

MOREFIELD, VICKIE MCEWEN, Ph.D. *Literacy That Matters: How Teachers' Instructional Decisions Shape Students' Reading Identities and Learning Outcomes.* (2013)

Directed by Dr. Colleen Fairbanks. 213 pp.

This research focused on students' reading identities and literacy learning and their potential relationships to teachers' instructional decisions in the support of these. The study included two experienced teachers from an ethnically diverse urban school district. This middle school setting included two classes each from one sixth-grade language arts teacher and one seventh-grade language arts teacher. A total of 120 students were invited to participate in this study and 66 returned parental consents and student assent. Multiple data sources informed the analysis including: videotaped observations, field notes, two student reading surveys, tickets out the door, student interviews, and teacher interviews. Data analysis focused on teaching practices defined as effective by the International Reading Association (2000) and the principled practices set forth by Sturtevant et al. (2006) and students' responses to these practices.

Findings included the students' view of reading and how the teachers' instructional decisions worked in support of the students' reading identities and literacy outcomes. Students understood that reading should: (a) have a purpose and connect to their personal lives, (b) be engaging, (c) lead to important understandings, and (d) be a comfortable fit to produce understanding. Students in these classes believed their reading was improving and their teachers were supporting their efforts. The structure of the classes varied slightly, but the focus on students' literacy and learning consistently informed the instructional decisions made by the teachers. These teachers articulated

confidence in the power of their instructional decisions to help improve literacy. Both teachers emphasized the importance of relationship building in their classrooms. This research begins with the students' view of reading and examines the ways in which two experienced teachers work to support both the reading identities of the students and their literacy learning.

LITERACY THAT MATTERS: HOW TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS
SHAPE STUDENTS' READING IDENTITIES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

by

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

Greensboro
2013

Approved by

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For Rick, Brittany, and Josh. With your support, I became a researcher.

For my grandfather, Walsy, who believed in the power of education and in his
granddaughter.

APPROVAL PAGE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my husband, Rick, and my children, Josh and Brittany. They listened to me think through ideas and concerns regarding the data too often. They supported me and sacrificed our time as a family. I would also like to thank my mother, Amelia, and my father, Mark, who encouraged me to stick with this seemingly endless “paper.” Many family members and others have supported me as well: Josh B., Angela, Ruth, Randy, Sammy, Jo, Linda, Mike, Aunt Jewell, my brothers, my sister, and my mother-in-law. I am thankful that two excellent educators allowed me to observe their teaching. They have inspired me, and I believe they will inspire others through this research. The administrative team at Lakeside welcomed me and made my data collection smooth. My friend, Tracey, not only supported me she assured me that I would survive.

My mentor, Dr. Colleen Fairbanks provided wisdom, guidance and encouragement with perfect timing. She read draft after draft and encouraged me to stick with the data to find my voice in reporting the study’s findings. Dr. Amy Vetter suggested that I use “tickets out the door” to help with the student identity piece of this study. This proved to be one of the most insightful data sources. Dr. Miller and Dr. Faircloth provided guidance in crafting the study, and Dr. Levin supported my efforts throughout the doctoral program. Dr. Johnston and Dr. Harrington encouraged my efforts early on in this process. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Tracy Smith for encouraging me to pursue this dream.

Thanks to all for believing in me!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The reading and basic literacy needs required from students entering public kindergarten in 2012 will be completely different from those they will need upon graduation thirteen years later. According to Gee (2011), today's students are situated as consumers of information that is pervasive, cheap, and easy to obtain, thereby requiring more sophisticated reading skills. Students must determine the accuracy of information as well as the reading skill necessary to construct meaning from texts. The primary goal of public education is to help students become self-directed learners who can plan, evaluate, and regulate their learning in order to develop an enduring interest in learning (Paris & Paris, 2001; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1996). The foundation of self-directed learning is reading (Paris & Paris, 2001; Paris et al., 1996). These literacy challenges become more complicated as students' reading preferences are influenced by current trends and issues, thus leaving traditional texts and topics seemingly antiquated or not engaging.

According to Ivey and Broaddus (2000), large-scale studies indicated that middle school students do not demonstrate the higher-level comprehension skills that are necessary for an enduring interest in reading and learning. As the Common Core for Reading (2010) shifts the instructional focus from fiction to nonfiction reading, teachers must meet new reading demands to help students meet these challenges. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) reported the following:

Self-reported data on individual behavioral patterns, combined with national test scores from the Department of Education and other sources, suggest three distinct trends: a historical decline in voluntary reading rates among teenagers and young adults; a gradual worsening of reading skills among older teens; and declining proficiency in adult readers. (p. 19)

Given claims that reading achievement and students' self-reported reading is on the decline, the emphasis on the ways teachers might bridge this gap becomes even more important. The goal of this research study was to better understand the relationships among teachers, their instructional decisions, students' reading identities, and literacy outcomes. Literacy outcomes were described using videotaped evidence from the classroom, students' descriptions of their reading outcomes and accomplishments, and teachers' descriptions of students' learning outcomes. Specifically, what results emerging from this qualitative data could provide a deeper understanding of teachers' instructional decisions in relation to the reading activities students found helpful? Additionally, this study will add to existing literature regarding how and why students come to develop reading identities. Finally, understanding how students described reading instruction that was meaningful will be powerful for teachers, researchers, and ultimately students.

Why Now?

Previous research on teaching (Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009) described what was considered excellent instruction in reading. Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, and McCormick (2010) noted that exemplary teachers included a wide range of materials, instruction in both skill development and motivation, assessment that showed students' strengths as well as their needs, and instruction in reading comprehension strategies.

The limited number of studies that have examined the effectiveness of reading instructional practices reported directly from the students' perspectives limits our understanding of reading instructional practices that may assist students in becoming self-directed learners who choose to read for a variety of personal reasons. Available research has begun to inform the literature using students' comments about reading instruction in terms of how students view reading overall, how open-ended interviews could encourage students to think about how they interpret text, and how some students use popular culture texts as a literacy tool (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Hall & Piazza, 2008; Heron-Hruby, Hagood, & Alvermann, 2008; Vetter, Fairbanks, Araial, 2011). While these studies focused on the students' views of reading instruction or the use of specific texts in reading instruction, research is needed on the specific reading practices that students describe as helpful and improve reading outcomes (Blanton, Wood, & Taylor, 2007; Pitcher et al., 2010). Existing studies of how middle school students perceive the reading instructional practices they describe as positive are limited. In addition, these studies do not specifically focus on how students perceive specific reading practices that help them improve literacy outcomes.

When considering the complexity of teaching and the instructional decisions teachers make during each reading lesson, the attempt to determine how or to what extent each aspect of the learning environment impacts students' learning outcomes in reading requires careful examination. If teachers and policy makers are to better understand how and to what extent the instructional decisions in reading impact the reading outcomes of students, the data collected and the data analyzed must consider the complex issues

surrounding this dynamic environment. This qualitative study provides a rich description of how students in diverse classrooms put voice to their reading identities and the learning outcomes provided by the class setting, context and instructional activities. The teachers and students in this study may help educators see how to improve instruction for students who may have been marginalized by their status as members of an ethnic minority or living in a low-income community (Lee, 2007). I believe findings from this study will assist teachers in making instructional decisions in reading informed by comprehensive data.

The need for projects that examine, “Literacy that Matters,” is more important than ever as educators work within time constraints caused by curriculum that could be described as a mile wide and an inch thick especially with pressures generated by the current testing climate. The most effective instructional strategies, the richest learning contexts, students’ identities as readers, and students’ learning outcomes in literacy are interconnected in ways that must be explored in greater depth with a focus on how teachers and students become partners in this process. This study explored those complicated relationships. I investigated with the full knowledge that relationships such as those described here must be viewed as unique, but I also expect some findings could be helpful in explaining how educators can improve decisions about literacy instruction.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted during the 2010-2011 school year with four teachers from the same research site. Dr. Colleen Fairbanks, Dr. Sam Miller, Claire Lambert (doctoral student) and Vickie Morefield (doctoral student) collected data from each of the

four classrooms using observational field notes for ten weeks, conducted two student surveys, and one teacher interview for each of the four participating teachers. Researchers proposed the following:

This research will explore the relationship among teachers and their instructional decisions, specific learning contexts, and student learning outcomes in literacy. Data will examine potential links among these relationships in terms of the development of students' literacy identities. Students' views of how teachers nurture the development of their literacy identities within language arts and social studies environments will be investigated. Instructional practices that encourage and promote students literacy identities will be examined.

As researchers, we did not begin the process believing that we would find a definitive answer to these questions. However, the pilot study did provide a foundation for the current study and ideas to address the complicated relationships at play in every classroom. One of the major limitations of the pilot research was the omission of student interviews. This limitation was addressed in this dissertation study and proved integral to understanding the relationships among teachers' instructional decisions, students' reading identities, and students' learning outcomes.

Philosophical Foundations and Theoretical Framework

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), all learning is based on the fundamental assumption that people interact within their world to create new understanding. This sociocultural lens is widely viewed as Vygotskian based. According to Vygotsky, humans use social interaction and language as their primary means of learning. He argued that higher mental functions should be considered the products of an individual's *semiotic mediation* aiding in the construction of learning. Viewed through this sociocultural lens,

others have argued that children use language and other *objects* as they interact within the reading environment to form identities (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leander & Zacher, 2007). Vygotsky (1986) described these objects as *psychological* tools that aid learners in the creation of new knowledge. Thus, students' uses of language, numeric systems, art, diagrams, and/or writing help in the formation of skillful reading practices that encourage students to see themselves as readers (Vygotsky, 1986).

How and when students *mediate* their learning with these specific *psychological tools* is explained through one of Vygotsky's most significant concepts – *the zone of proximal development* (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky (1986) explains this concept in the following: “The discrepancy between a child's actual mental age and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance indicates the zone of his proximal development” (p. 187). In other words, students can learn more working with others who are considered more knowledgeable about the topic being studied. Using a sociocultural lens, reading identities may be influenced when students work with others who can provide insight and at times provide instructional scaffolding (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1986). These more knowledgeable others may be both peers and adults underscoring the need for a reading environment that espouses these sociocultural principles of learning.

Researching *how* students use *semiotic mediation* with specific *psychological tools* has made the social act of reading more visible, and thus provides opportunities to study how students may come to form identities as readers (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996;

Leander & Zacher, 2007). Researchers have amassed a number of studies, commentaries, and theoretical perspectives providing educators and other researchers with a somewhat detailed description of what reading looks like through a sociocultural lens (Black, 2005; Faircloth, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leander & Zacher, 2007; Moje et al., 2004). Collectively, these descriptions describe the ways in which students participate in a variety of literacy activities they view as engaging. Student participation in activities that are relevant and focus on topics that require personal investment encourages students to take ownership of their reading practices. This study focused on understanding how students form reading identities using the *psychological tools* associated with literacy and the *semiotic mediation* of classroom instruction, along with any research that provided the first person view of how reading is perceived by students (Fairbanks, 2000; Faircloth, 2009; Moje et al., 2004). Returning to Vygotsky's (1986) claim that language is a primary tool for learning underscores the need to use students' voices to clarify how they perceive reading and their engagement with texts.

Vygotsky claimed that one's intellect and affect are inseparable. If this is so, the literacy practices of a classroom cannot be divorced from the formation of the individual's potential reading identities (Roth & Lee, 2007). As cited by Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008), Gee (1996) described the concept of a Discourse community as one where students share the same literacy practices with a community or specific group. Understanding students' reading identities cannot be separated into categories detailing the literacy practices of the classroom or the Discourses of the students' lives. For this reason, educators must build a clearer understanding of both the literacy practices of the

classroom and the Discourses of the students who participate in these literacy practices. Even issues such as a texts' selection become important when we consider how a student's purpose for reading may differ from one context to another.

Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, and Waff (1998) detail three ironies that exist in the literacy lives of youth. First, schooled literacy is a Discourse that potentially *others*. School curriculum that devalues the students' identities severely curtails the adolescents' desire to read independently. Second, literacy encapsulates power through an *absent presence*. This concept of the *absent presence* of power notes the ways in which literacy practices have been dominated by a Western view of thinking that literacy is a neutral act. Finally, the irony that researchers and teachers claim that students are the most important people in the room is contrary to the ways in which research is reported. More often than not, Alvermann and her colleagues argue, research reports students' perspectives regarding what matters most in terms of literacy experiences to a limited number of brief quotes. The tendency to report from the teacher's perspective limits the field of the adolescent by excluding the most important voice – the student. This study, by contrast, privileges the students' voices using the videotaped observations, students' interviews', students' reading surveys, and the students' tickets out the door. Since language is a culturally and socially constructed process that is mediated through students' interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1986), a thorough understanding of how middle school students view the reading activities of the classroom is essential. For example, reading instruction that encourages students to think about and discuss topics that are personally meaningful promotes opportunities for students to challenge and draw

conclusions about these complicated issues, tools necessary to become a critical reader (Wolk, 2009).

While this study did not focus on Lee's (2007) Cultural Model for analysis, the basic concepts of this Model provided a way to organize and understand the social world of these classrooms. Considering how culture may shape the students' views and the teachers' views of literacy learning offered guidance about these interactions. Thus, understanding how culture influences teachers' instructional practices and students' learning was imperative in this study of reading and students' reading identities.

To determine what literacy matters to students as they become literate adults, we must also consider not only the context of school, but the ways in which learning takes place. This study builds on Vygotsky's (1986) description of learning as a process beginning with the individual's consciousness and built through relations with others. The idea that learning is socially constructed and includes the higher mental functions that are considered the products of mediated activities is of particular importance to our understanding of student's perceptions about specific reading activities and instructional practices. Just as the value of socially constructed learning cannot be ignored, the constantly changing social conditions yield great influence on students' learning (Kellner, 2003). The responsibility of our schools and specifically literacy instruction is to question how youth and their experiences can be used to inform the instructional decisions made by teachers to prepare all students for their futures.

While a sociocultural lens provided the basic understanding for students' literacy learning in this study, a philosophical paradigm of pragmatism helped to guide the

research. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), this worldview focuses on following:

the consequences of research, is on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods, and on the use of multiple methods of data collection to inform the problems under study. Thus, it is pluralistic and oriented toward ‘what works’ and ‘practice.’ (p. 41)

I believe that researchers must carefully examine “what works” in terms of literacy instruction and share this knowledge with educators who are charged with helping their students meet the literacy challenges of a continually changing world.

This Study

This study was designed to examine the instructional practices of two teachers who were identified as excellent reading teachers through principal recommendations, my professional interactions with the teachers, and findings from the pilot study. I wanted to better understand how these teachers espoused the qualities described by the International Reading Association (2000) for excellent teachers of reading with potential relationships that might influence students’ reading identities.

To build a more thorough understanding of how teachers’ decisions within a specific learning context shapes students’ reading identities and their learning outcomes in reading, the following questions will be used to guide this research:

- How do the instructional practices in reading, defined as essential for middle school teachers, work in support of students’ literacy and learning in two urban middle school classes?

- In what ways do the participant teachers adopt, adapt, or resist reading practices that have been identified as positive in helping students' literacy and learning development within specific learning contexts?
- How do students define what it means to be a good reader?
- How do students describe the instructional activities of the classroom in relation to their reading identities?
- What relationships exist among the instructional practices of reading teachers, how students define good readers, and students' reading identities?

For this particular study, instructional decisions, specific learning contexts, students' learning outcomes, and students' reading identities were defined in the following manner:

1. Instructional decisions refer to how teachers choose to teach a particular skill or topic. This decision was based on what best fits the needs of the students in the class (Blanton et al., 2007; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000).
2. Specific learning contexts refer to the texts/media used for instruction along with the teacher's decisions about students' grouping within the learning context (Campbell, 2007; Gillespie, 2005; Ryan, 2008).
3. Students' learning outcomes refer to how students' reading changed as identified through the following: video evidence collected from the classroom, how students described the learning contexts as meaningful and helpful in the construction of reading identities (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Kelley & Decker, 2009), and authentic learning assessments (S. Miller, 2003).

4. Students' reading identities refer to how students perform identities as readers in specific contexts and in response to these contexts. Reading identities will include students' engagement in reading activities (Faircloth, 2009; S. Miller, 2003; Pitcher et al., 2010; Rosenblatt, 1982), students' flexibility in reading a variety of texts in a variety of formats for meaning (Rosenblatt, 1982), and students' use of critical thinking skills to read texts and construct personal meaning (Hall & Piazza, 2008). These identities were not stable across time or context and included the ways in which students used reading in their personal lives (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Hall & Piazza, 2008; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008).

I will define excellent teachers as those teachers who have been identified as successful in improving their students' achievement scores (International Reading Association, 2000), as well as those teachers who create opportunities for what students describe as positive learning outcomes. Coupled with the IRA's (2000) characteristics of excellent reading teachers, I add the eight *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy* (Sturtevant et al., 2006), which creates a framework for instruction centered on three principles: those related to the contexts for learning, those related to instructional practices, and those related to connections between literacy in and out of school. Certainly, there are other ways to describe good reading instruction such as strictly using standardized test scores or quarterly grades. I will use the IRA's (2000) characteristics of excellent reading teachers along with the *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy* (2006) to inform how I view the literacy practices of the classroom since the demands of literacy education

today depend on both school-based instruction and the students' perspectives of what is meaningful and helpful to them as literacy learners.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study will draw upon the following four areas of research: the basics of adolescent literacy, teaching practices considered effective in terms of students' reading development, students' identities as readers, and the role of motivation and engagement in reading development. The goal of understanding what helps students make meaning from text in order to see reading as beneficial requires teachers and researchers to understand the basic issues of a literacy that matters to adolescents.

The literature on teaching provides specific criteria for what constitutes good or excellent reading instruction. In 2000, the IRA adopted a position statement that details the critical knowledge and practices of *excellent* reading teachers. The six critical qualities include: (1) an understanding of the development of reading and writing and a belief that all children can learn to read and write, (2) use of ongoing assessments of individual student's progress to relate instruction to previous experiences, (3) knowledge and use of a variety of ways to teach reading effectively, (4) use of a variety of materials and texts for reading, (5) flexible grouping to tailor instruction, and (6) "coaching" as reading instructors (p. 235). The comprehensive nature of these qualities could be used as a guide for determining how students perceive the instructional activities and reading in the class, and how these instructional activities are being used (or not used) to increase students' outcomes in reading.

The Basics of Adolescent Literacy

The typical adolescent sitting in a middle school classroom today has probably participated in many literacy experiences considered novel to their teachers, or one's teachers do not see as a viable option for integrating into their instructional practices. For example, students may have played video games, watched and/or produced You Tube videos, used a social networking site, used the internet to search for information of interest, or texted friends on a regular basis. These new digital experiences along with a changing youth culture may create a mismatch between teachers and students in terms of interests and needs (Alvermann, 2010; Gee, 2011; Moje, 2002). Gee postulates that "language is always interpreted relative to specific contexts of use" (p. 121). How youth use language must be situated within the context of their worlds.

Today's Youth and Their Literacy Needs

Youth are not only influenced by their digital experiences and previous personal experiences. These previous personal experiences are in great part due to their cultural heritage. Understanding the diverse cultures and experiences that students bring with them as learners (Kellner, 2003; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Morrell, 2002) requires teachers to be aware of the dynamic relationships among culture, language, and instruction (Alvermann, 2010; Black, 2005; Gee, 2011; Moje, 2002). Teachers who understand and value the varied knowledge students bring to the classroom via culture or language are able to use this knowledge to design instructional activities to fit the needs of the students (Alvermann, 2010; Black, 2005; Faircloth, 2009; Gee, 2011; Lucas et al., 2008; Moje, 2002; Morrell,

2002). Today's youth need to be flexible (Rosenblatt, 1982), and engaged (Faircloth, 2009; S. Miller, 2003; Pitcher et al., 2010; Rosenblatt, 1982) as critical readers (Hall & Piazza, 2008).

This research generates an important question. What do students need from literacy instruction today? Current research establishes a strong case for learning environments designed to foster critical thinking, citizenship, global awareness and the tools to adapt to an ever changing world (Alvermann, 2010; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Hall & Piazza, 2008; Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010; The New London Group, 1996). The New London Group (1996) describes this as a theoretical shift examining the connections between a changing social world that both students and teachers face in terms of how literacy is approached. They propose a "multiliteracies" approach to literacy as students will be required to communicate in multiple ways and in an ever changing culturally and linguistically diverse world. Students must know how to negotiate the literacy skills situated within contexts that are increasingly complex and continually changing (Alvermann, 2010; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Gee, 2011; Moje, 2002; Morrell, 2002).

What is Known about Students' Literacies

Given the overwhelming demands on students, one would consider the status of our current educational system as devoid of hope. As stated earlier, Ivey and Broaddus (2000) indicated that middle school students do not demonstrate the higher-level comprehension skills necessary for an enduring interest in reading and learning. In addition to this, The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) reported students are not

reading independently and older teens and adults' reading comprehension have actually declined. Conversely, other research points to untapped students' resources as a means of connecting students' literacy needs to these critical literacy demands (Lee, 2007; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992). Recognizing the potential mismatch between students' cultures and their cultural repertoires would target instruction focused on the importance of using students' cultures and experiences as a way to provide relevance and meaning (Black, 2005; Lee, 2007; Moje et al., 2004; Morrell, 2002). Research on language development builds a clear connection between what students know and how educators can use this knowledge to increase students' literacy development (Vygotsky, 1986). It seems equally important that educators know their students (Faircloth, 2009; Sturtevant & Linek, 2003) to fully understanding the possibilities for learning afforded through students' cultural repertoires and the opportunities these repertoires provide to appropriate new ways of interacting with texts.

Literacy in Today's Classroom

The research on students' knowledge and students' literacies leads to another important question. If learning is socially constructed, how does it occur (or how should this occur) in the school settings for today's youth? According to P. H. Miller (2011), to acknowledge that students are embedded in a sociocultural matrix and that any students' behavior cannot be understood independently of this ever-present matrix defines the context in which learning occurs. P. H. Miller (2011) cites Vygotsky's (1986) description of culture. According to Vygotsky (1986), culture is a concept defined by each culture and this view holds significant implications for literacy instruction in today's classroom.

Within any culture, its members define through cultural practices what knowledge and skills students need to acquire and how those learning opportunities should be designed to give students the tools and technology needed to acquire those skills.

Continuing with this line of research, Wolk (2009) discusses the need for a shift from the traditional paradigm of lecture teaching to one incorporating inquiry-based teaching with shorter texts and a variety of teaching strategies to create meaningful connections focusing on issues of social responsibility. When students are constructing meaningful knowledge the emphasis shifts from students' book smarts to include what Hatt (2007) describes as street smarts. While Hatt's (2007) study focused on older teens the following concept holds true for students in middle grades: "Every student that is a part of the institution of schooling develops an academic identity that helps to shape who we think we are, who others think we are, and who we think we should become" (p. 146). This development of an academic identity could ideally inform how learning should occur for our youth.

Research describes meaningful contexts for literacy learning as those providing relevance in helping students connect to other learning (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Ivey, 2002; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; S. Miller, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1982). Beginning with Rosenblatt's (1982) description of reading as a tool for exploring literature with the purpose of making sense of one's world, research clarifies the inter-connected role of meaning and relevance on student learning (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; S. Miller, 2003). According to Lapp and Fisher (2009), text selection must consider students' needs and interests to engage and motivate literacy learning if students are to

make personal use of the text as a tool for literacy growth. Research is beginning to focus on how digital learning may provide meaningful contexts and texts for students' literacy learning (Alvermann, 2010; Gee, 2011; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Morrell, 2002). As this line of research continues, research should focus on how teachers use both digital resources along with more traditional texts to engage students in the context of the classroom and with texts designed to help prepare youth for today's literacy needs.

Youth Describe Literacy Learning

For researchers and teachers to develop a more comprehensive portrait of today's youth, research must ask the following: What do students describe as meaningful literacy experiences? If students believe that experiences are meaningful, they will tend to be more engaged (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; S. Miller, 2003; Pitcher et al., 2010). In a three-year case study (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006), students were reportedly alienated by school practices, yet they persisted in their belief that school was important. The researchers reported that the girls' followed in this study wanted to have "real" academic work that was relevant and meaningful. Pitcher et al. (2010) noted similar results describing students who were reportedly detached from literacy activities and who experienced a steady diet of simply reading a text and answering questions. Student engagement is essential in sustaining long-term participation in activities promoting literacy learning (S. Miller, 2003).

While the studies reported here do help to inform researchers' understanding of what students describe as meaningful, we lack sufficient research to thoroughly understand the ways in which students' descriptions of meaningful literacy experiences

could assist teachers in instructional planning. How teachers work to adapt instructional practices as they consider what is known about today's youth is central to understanding literacy that works.

Teaching Practices and Literacy That Matters

Members from the IRA including Sturtevant, Boyd, Brozo, Hinchman, Moore, and Alvermann collaborated on research that became known as *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy: A Framework for Instruction and Policy* published in 2006. The principled practices within this framework focus on three key areas: (1) the principles relating to contexts for learning, (2) the principles relating to instructional practices, and (3) the principles related to connections between literacy in and out of school. Within the three areas the eight principles for literacy instruction are elaborated. Sturtevant et al. (2006) define the *Principled Practices* in the following:

Principles related to contexts for learning:

1. Adolescents need opportunities to participate in active learning environments that offer clear and facilitative literacy instruction.
2. Adolescents need opportunities to participate in respectful environments characterized by high expectations, trust, and care.

Principles related to instructional practices:

3. Adolescents need opportunities to engage with print and non-print texts for a variety of purposes.
4. Adolescents need opportunities to generate and express rich understandings of ideas and concepts.

5. Adolescents need opportunities to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and learning.
6. Adolescents need opportunities to assess their literacy and learning competencies, and direct their future growth.

Principles related to connections between literacy in and out of school:

7. Adolescents need opportunities to connect reading with their life and their learning inside and outside of school.
8. Adolescents need opportunities to develop critical perspectives toward what they read, view, and hear. (p. 4)

The IRA's (2000) position details the critical knowledge and practices *excellent* reading teachers should espouse: (1) an understanding of the development of reading and writing and a belief that all children can learn to read and write, (2) use of ongoing assessments of individual student's progress to relate instruction to previous experiences, (3) knowledge and use of a variety of ways to teach reading effectively, (4) use of a variety of materials and texts for reading, (5) flexible grouping to tailor instruction, and (6) "coaching" as reading instructors (p. 235). These critical knowledge and practices describe the teachers and their instruction while the *Principled Practices* (2006) focus on what students need to become readers. Focusing on teachers' decisions within the broader field of students' needs combines the IRA (2000) and *Principled Practices* (2006) to inform literacy that matters to students in today's classrooms as the focus rather than what has worked with adolescents in the past. The *Principled Practices* focus on the contexts for learning as socially constructed and that actively engage students in the

literacy environment. Additionally, the focus on instructional practices that include both multiple literacies and multimodal literacies provides students with opportunities to engage in literacies practices that are more similar to their personal needs. Finally, the recognition that school literacies must be informed through connections to out-of-school experiences is more likely to motivate students to be fully engaged in literacy learning. I believe it is the pushing against what may seem like more traditional methods of instruction and more traditional ideologies of literacy that current and future research must explore.

Instructional Practices That Claim Success in Student Literacy Learning

Sturtevant et al. (2006) outline principled practices designed to inform instruction and policy decisions about youth literacy that draws from what is known about adolescents' today. These practices require a shift from more traditional forms of instruction such as those in which lectures, round robin reading, or skill drill assignments are typical in literacy instruction. Instructional practices claiming success when the role of the teacher and student assume a teacher/learner dyad (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as the primary mode of instructional delivery do not espouse current literacy research. Not all research claiming success in literacy learning has embraced the principled practices previously described as those which should be focused on students' needs. Understanding these practices in relation to the context for learning, the instructional practices that promote socially constructed knowledge, or those that connect students' in-school literacy experiences to their out-of-school literacy experiences are critical.

Although Flynt and Cooter (2005) relied on several bodies of research in the development of The Memphis Comprehension Framework, which was designed to help students understand expository texts, this Framework, for example, does not include helping students make connections with their personal lives nor does it provide students with the opportunity for socially constructing knowledge. This model reported successful student outcomes when teachers implemented three crucial steps: pre-planning, focused read-alouds with discussions, and three-level retellings. The basic concept behind The Memphis Comprehension Framework is the scaffolding of expository text due to the complex nature of the text and the demands of new vocabulary.

By contrast, Blanton et al. (2007) argued against reading approaches focusing on teacher-directed lectures and other traditionally acceptable practices, such as round-robin reading. They claim that such teacher/learner dyads do not produce the transformative learning essential for students to develop as readers. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) described effective instructional practices as those that do not subscribe to a “one-size-fits-all” mantra. Like Blanton et al. (2007), Ivey and Broaddus (2000) note that teachers may actually design literacy instruction limiting students’ access to reading due to lack of materials and resources or lack of student ownership. These limitations are compounded by other issues such as the limited use of digital resources for learning and the inequities that stem from ignoring students’ personal funds of knowledge in designing meaningful and engaging instruction.

Fostering students’ interest and engagement in literacy activities that support students’ development of flexibility in reading, engagement in literacy practices, and

critical thinking as readers requires teaching practices created by an encouraging environment (Faircloth, 2009). This research contends that students need to participate in activities that adolescents feel are relevant and also provide opportunities to make personal connections, activities that are also described in *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy: A Framework for Instruction and Policy* (2006).

Classrooms That Espouse These Critical Qualities

What do instructional practices look like in a classroom where all students are believed to be capable of reading and writing; where teachers assess and use the data to relate to students' experiences; where a variety of methods are used to teach and a variety of texts are provided for students to read; and where teachers coach their students in flexible groups? Collectively, these critical qualities inform researchers and teachers about classrooms whose design has a positive influence on students' literacy.

Reading instruction varies from school to school and class to class. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) described the need for teachers to move from a *one-size-fits-all* instruction to one addressing the wide range of reading needs of students within each class. For example, effective teachers read aloud to their students as a means of engaging students and motivating students to find out more about a topic (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Flynt & Cooter, 2005; Lapp & Fisher, 2009). Albright and Ariail (2005) explained the varied reasons that teachers include read alouds from modeling good reading practices, developing background knowledge in content areas, motivating students to find out more about a topic, and creating a sense of belonging to a learning community. While most research has been conducted with elementary students in this area, read alouds seem to

hold promise as an instructional tool for middle school students as well. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) reported that students enjoyed and ascribed a positive meaning when teachers read aloud in their middle school classrooms. This research also suggests that teachers move students toward independent reading, providing choice for this independent reading, and learning about the uniqueness of each reader and writer within the classroom.

In a two-year study, Guthrie and Cox (2001) and Guthrie and Davis (2003) examined the role of reading instructional practices designed as real-world experiences that were goal oriented. Researchers wanted to know how these experiences motivated students to learn. This research discussed how the use of student choice empowered students to learn more about a topic of relevance. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) described this in terms of minimizing whole-class instruction in favor of instruction where teachers helped students with tasks that were individually appropriate and personally relevant.

Blanton et al. (2007) argued that middle school reading instruction was not meeting the complex needs of adolescent readers. Their argument examined seven instructional practices currently used in reading classrooms that researchers have described as powerful tools in the development of complex reading skills. These instructional practices include: a 5th *dimension* where students engage in reading activities using technology, the use of *Web quests* for student-inquiry, *reciprocal teaching*, *Question-Answer Relationship (QAR)*, *think-alouds*, *literature circles and book clubs*, and the skillful use of *discussion approaches*. Blanton et al. (2007) described these instructional practices as critical characteristics in a successful reading program. Their

claim contends these instructional practices are not as common as more traditional approaches, noted as well by Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) in a longitudinal study of three adolescent girls who described classroom learning experiences as discrete-skill oriented instruction. Blanton et al. (2007) and Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) describe how literacy practices focused on transmission-oriented learning do not produce transformative literacy experiences.

The literature on reading instruction describes what should occur in classrooms espousing transformative teaching, but more often than not, classrooms are described in terms of what should be visible rather than what is generally visible. While excellent teachers are widely researched, far less research is available detailing how students describe or fail to describe whether this reading instruction is helpful.

Students' Identities as Literacy Learners

How students describe reading instruction they consider helpful may provide much needed information regarding the reading identities to which students ascribe. More specifically, how teachers can promote the development of reading identities in which students view engagement in reading as meaningful, their ability to critically read texts as important, and their ability to read a variety of texts as important to their reading identities. The following literature review will examine the role of the teacher in students' development of reading identities, the role of the learner in the development of reading identities, what is currently known about students' reading identities, and the role of culture and the impact of teachers on students' reading identities.

The Role of the Teacher in Students' Development of Reading Identities

Research confirms the pivotal role of teachers in the development of students' reading identities (Hall & Piazza, 2008; Hatt, 2007; Moje et al., 2004; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). Teachers who understand the variety of knowledge funds available to the learners within the classroom use this knowledge when creating instructional opportunities for students to improve reading achievement (Moje et al., 2004; Moll, 2001; Vetter, Fairbanks, & Ariail, 2011). Vetter et al. (2011) argued this point in the following: "When teachers connect instructional practices with the development of youths' identities by making connections to who they are and who they might become in the future, students are more likely to become invested in what they are learning" (p. 203).

Students who feel disenfranchised are less likely to engage in or to become participating members of the learning community (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). Hatt's (2007) study confirmed Sealy-Ruiz and Greene (2011) that *smartness* seems to be defined by youth in terms of street smarts and is generally different in terms of academic success. Drawing from Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), Hatt (2007) describes this alienation in the following way: "Every student that is a part of the institution of schooling develops an academic identity that helps to shape who we think we are, who others think we are, and who we think we should become." Teachers play a pivotal role in the creation of learning environments designed to engage students in meaningful and relevant activities and that mirrors success as defined by both the student and the teacher (Hatt, 2007; Moje et al., 2004; Moll, 2001; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011).

Hall and Piazza (2008) combined two studies in an attempt to bring insight as to how and why students do and do not use a critical literacy stance to interpret texts and to provide specific suggestions as to how teachers might select and use texts to foster critical literacy. When students take a critical stance as readers, they develop a reading identity that recognizes this as a valuable aspect of literacy. They concluded that students' engagement with and interpretation of texts is likely rooted in how students think they need to read and respond to texts in order to be successful. Again, the teacher's role in creating an environment designed to foster engagement with relevant texts seems to be essential in the development of students' reading identities.

There are limitations in applying the findings from Hatt (2007) and Hall and Piazza (2008) to this research. Hatt (2007) focuses on students from a high school setting and Hall and Piazza (2008) focus on elementary students. The findings give an overall view of the teacher's role in the development of reading identities, but they must be viewed with the understanding that middle school youth are different from elementary and high school students.

The Role of the Learner in the Development of Reading Identities

Today's youth are continually shaping and reshaping their identities as human beings (Holland et al., 1998). The reading identities students bring to the classroom come from multiple aspects of their personal lives. Wortham (2011) examined multiple international studies to determine how youth cultures and educational practices are related. He identified a central theme among youth related to the significant role gender, class, race, and even national identity play in how both adults perceive youth and youth

experience school. The influence of digital technology on youth has also been examined by other researchers (Alvermann, 2010; Gee, 2011; Hull et al., 2010; Kafai & Peppler, 2011; Leander & Zacher, 2007; Morrell, 2002). These digital technologies shape the reading identities of its participants and warrant teacher's considerations in instructional planning.

Holland et al. (1998) would propose that each aspect of the students' life influences all other aspects creating complex identities within each classroom. Even more complicated are the ways in which these complex identities co-mingle with one another within the class. These changing social spaces could provide clarity as to how students' reading identities are shaped within the classroom (Leander & Zacher, 2007). Since students have and take up multiple reading identities in relationship to any particular activity, one student may perform as a competent, engaged reader in one context while in another activity the same student may take up one of reluctance. It is finding the right combination of reading activities that nurture the development of readers who describe competency as readers, engagement in reading activities, flexibility as readers, and the ability to thinking critically as important.

How Culture, Teachers, and Students' Reading Identities Interact

Explaining how students' reading identities take form has been conceptualized using metaphors and these identities are considered to be perpetually evolving (Holland et al., 1998; Leander & Zacher, 2007). As metaphors, identity may be viewed in the following ways: identity as difference, identity as a sense of self, identity as sense of development, identity as mind or consciousness, identity as a narrative, and identity as

position (Holland et al., 1998). While each metaphor or perspective assumes the social construction of identities, each metaphor also acknowledges the changing nature of identities. None of the metaphors assume that identities are formed solely in the individual, and each recognizes that identities are lived out in individuals, socially situated, socially mediated, and socially produced. Understanding the complex nature of identity sheds light on how each student participating in the class brings unique contributions from their varied backgrounds.

It is imperative that teachers and researchers consider the role of culture in designing reading instruction students describe as relevant and engaging. Teachers must draw from the students' cultural repertoires as well as the popular culture of the community. Designing instruction informed by students' cultures provide opportunities for students to develop reading identities that value critical thinking as readers read a variety of texts that build flexibility as a reader.

The Role of Motivation and Engagement in Literacy Classrooms

Leander and Zacher (2007) conceive of literacy classrooms as *crossroads* where adolescents produce reading identities when literacy activities occur within various cultural settings. My interest in the development of reader identities requires understanding how engagement in reading may lead to motivation to read, competency as a reader, flexibility as a reader, and the ability to think critically. Graham and Weiner (1996) illustrate the concept of how engagement and motivation work together in the following:

. . . it is common knowledge that if a person is engaged in an activity that is interesting, engrossing, and involving, and the person is oblivious to all else, then motivation is high. Intensity, persistence, and other indicators of motivation will thereby be augmented. (p. 63)

The previous section of this review examined what today's youth read and how teachers can provide agentic opportunities to foster the development of reading identities. Now, we must consider the role of both the student and the teacher in terms of motivation and engagement in a literacy classroom that works for adolescents.

Teachers' Understandings of Student Motivation and Engagement in Literacy Learning

To more fully understand the role of motivation and engagement in literacy learning, it is important to consider how teachers view student motivation and engagement in literacy learning. Graham and Weiner (1996) define motivation as "the study of why people think and behave as they do" (p. 63). Teacher's understanding of why their students think and behave as they do is central to the concept of an engaging classroom. As teachers consider how students can be motivated to learn within specific learning contexts, the literacy instruction becomes the vehicle that engages students within that context.

According to Hickey (2003), "there seems to be little consensus regarding the scope and characterization of 'context' and its relationship to motivation" (p. 402). In analyzing the role of context and motivation, Hickey (2003) argues the following:

First, the assumption learners internalize knowledge via participation in social interaction have modest implications for achievement motivation. Second, the assumption that participation necessarily changes that knowledge has profound implications for achievement motivation. Third, if participation changes

knowledge, participation in any knowledgeable activity (with or without actual collaboration) represents social interaction with important implications for motivation. (p. 404)

Teachers who understand the role of context and motivation understand that as students participate in the literacy environment the relationship between the context and motivation becomes stronger (Hickey, 2003). Similarly, teachers who understand that language is comprised of the collective participation of each member of the class designs instructional activities allowing this relationship between context and motivation to flourish.

According to Greeno, Collins, and Resnick (1997), researchers have the following responsibility:

to develop and analyze new possibilities for practice, not just to provide inspiring examples, but also to provide analytical concepts and principles that support understanding of the examples and guidance for people who wish to use the examples as models in transforming their own practices. (p. 41)

Lave and Wenger (1991) detail how these concepts dramatically shift the role of teachers in classrooms as they change from a teacher/learner dyad as the primary mode of instructional delivery. Transforming classrooms will include a “richly diverse field of essential actors and, with it, other forms of relationships of participation” (p. 56).

Teachers who view the contextual relationships of the classroom as not fixed or finished but as continually evolving not only encourage discourse but also encourage the multiple perspectives espoused by various cultures (Moll et al., 1992; Moll, 2001). The continuous practice of reading the classroom environment for students’ various funds of

knowledge as a means of anticipating opportunities for student participation and engagement (Moll, 2001) allows teachers to maximize the transformative learning described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as legitimate peripheral learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe legitimate peripheral participation as connected to “the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice” (p. 55). Teachers who view classrooms as communities of practice understand the pivotal role of participation as students become both absorbed by the culture of practice and absorbed in the culture of practice. While teachers who view engagement and motivation as essential to students’ literacy learning, S. Miller and Faircloth (2008) concluded that, “Minimal attention, if any, is directed towards motivation, particularly as it relates to a student’s disposition to engage voluntarily with an activity or study when the intervention is terminated” (p. 318).

Student’s View of Classroom Activities That are Described as Motivating and Engaging

In order to better understand the teachers’ roles in motivating reading and nurturing students’ identities as readers, it is important to consider how students describe the reading instructional practices and activities they consider engaging, meaningful, and transformative. Ivey (2002) and Ivey and Broaddus (2000) described student selected independent reading as being meaningful. Ivey (2002) reported that 63% of students participating in a reading survey enjoyed independent reading. According to Unrau and Schlackman (2006), students who are intrinsically motivated by their own pursuits are more likely to persevere. Furthermore, students reported curiosity, involvement and challenge as a motivation for reading. Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) reported that a lack of

personal connection with literacy learning created a feeling of disconnect for students between the work of school and personal meaning. Additionally, activities students' viewed as *doing* were described as engaging and meaningful. For example, making a poster or completing a project with clear expectations and explanations from the teacher were considered motivating and engaging.

Research describes reading performances using different criteria (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; S. Miller, 2003). Reading performances could include: classroom discourse, classroom activities, class grades, and end-of-grade test scores (Aud et al., 2010). These performances have different meanings to students in terms of how they view smartness and how they interpret their smartness or lack of smartness in relation to reading activities, class grades and/or end-of-grade test scores (Hatt, 2007). S. Miller (2003) examined the role of high-and low-challenge tasks and found that students were more willing to persist with high-challenge tasks that required more time to complete and required more complex thinking from students. Students who identify with the curriculum valued by the school tend to identify their reading performances as positive, while students whose cultural capital does not allow them to connect with the activities within the school setting see their performances as less than (Hatt, 2007). With the increasing demand for the complex reading skills required of our students (Blanton et al., 2007), how students describe or fail to describe reading instruction in terms of meaning could be powerful for teachers, researchers, and more importantly for students. Students' reading performances seem to be enhanced by assessments that motivate and engage students in high-challenge task.

Faircloth (2009) confirmed the degree to which students identify with classroom reading activities and the ways in which connections between students' identities and school tasks supported students' sense of belonging was a key determinant in how students described classroom reading. Similarly, Heron-Hruby et al. (2008) found that pop culture both motivated students and allowed them to use their personal funds of knowledge as literacy learners (Moll et al., 1992). Other researchers (Pitcher et al., 2010) described the potential for online resources including games and other online resources as valued by students.

Although students articulate choice, independent reading, technology, and *doing* as intrinsically motivating, researchers report that middle school students are choosing not to read (Blanton et al., 2007; Ivey, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Ryan, 2008; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Students' personal views of their reading performance is shaped through their participation in classroom activities (Casey, 2008; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Faircloth; 2009; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Hall & Piazza; 2008; Heron-Hruby et al., 2008).

Classrooms that are engaging and espouse participatory practices are those in which teachers' and students' dialogue sets the stage for this engagement (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Klem & Connell, 2004). According to Klem and Connell (2004), students who experience high levels of teacher support are two and a half times more likely to self-report engagement with school activities. Researchers note a strong link between teachers' support, students' engagement, and students' academic

performances. Gutierrez et al. (1995) describe this type of engagement as more than bringing students into the script; it is giving students voice.

The review of the literature focusing on adolescents' literacy needs, teaching practices in support of these needs, students' identities, and motivation and engagement call for research designed to better understand these complex relationships. This qualitative study was informed by the literature and was designed to add insight for educators working with today's youth.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Understanding how excellent reading instruction works in support of students' literacy and learning is more important than ever given the rapidly changing literacy environment. This qualitative research builds on a pilot study that included four teachers from a diverse urban setting during the spring of 2010. The nature of the research questions proposed for this study required an explanation of this teaching phenomenon within the real-life context of the classroom (Yin, 2002). This study provided an opportunity to explore a wide variety of students and the instructional decisions the teachers made in order to support their development as readers. The careful selection of the two highly effective teacher participants allowed me to examine the results across the cases. A case study approach was required to understand and support a more generalized range of teaching situations.

This study invited the two language arts teachers from the pilot study to participate because of the strong instructional practices reported in support of students' reading identities. Data from the pilot study confirmed that both teachers were found to practice the IRA's (2000) six critical qualities of excellent reading teachers. For this study, both teachers agreed to participate in data collection that included weekly observations of two classes for ten weeks (see Appendix A). Each class was videotaped and researchers took field notes during each session. A total of forty class sessions is

included in these data. Each teacher was interviewed after the classroom observations were completed (see Appendix B). Students returning a parent consent and assent form completed two reading surveys (see Appendices C and D). A total of 59 students completed both the Kelley and Decker (2009) and the adapted version of the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reading interest surveys. Twenty-six sixth graders completed the reading surveys and 33 seventh graders completed both surveys. A total of 13 students were interviewed one time (see Appendix E). Six sixth graders participated in the student interviews this included one student from core one and five from core two. Seven seventh-graders were interviewed three students from core one and four from core two. Finally, this qualitative research included tickets out the door that asked students to reflect on their reading at the end of instruction for at least five classes (see Appendix F). A total of 653 tickets were completed with 323 from sixth-grade students and 330 from seventh graders. Combined these data sources provided a more complete view of teachers' instructional decisions and how these may help shape students' reading identities.

Setting

This research included one middle school that will be referred to as Lakeside Middle located on the urban fringe of a mid-sized city in a southeastern state. Lakeside was selected for this study based on my familiarity of the school. I worked at this school for 11 years, so I knew both Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace. Also, this school's diverse population provided an opportunity to examine the successes of students in what might be considered a high needs school. At the time of the study, Lakeside was currently the

largest middle school in the school district and served students from grades six through eight. Approximately 1,140 students attended this school. Lakeside served as a professional development site for student teachers from a local university. The school was recognized as a School of Distinction using North Carolina's ABC accountability criteria, which meant between 80 and 90% of the student population performed at grade level on the State's standardized reading test. Although the students' overall composite on the State's end of grade tests was 81.8%, the school did not make growth with all of its subgroups. In particular, students with disabilities did not meet the ABC criteria for growth.

Lakeside was in its second year as a participant in the County's initiative to assist high needs schools. Schools were selected for participation based upon a weighted formula inclusive of teacher turnover rate, Value Added Data, percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Value Added Data were considered a comprehensive reporting system designed to identify students who were at risk based on past performances on standardized tests. Teachers were expected to use these data to adjust their teaching practices. Value Added Data (or SAS EVAAS) data reported students' predicted scores against their actual scores in reading. Teachers were evaluated using the students' testing data including whether or not they met the predicted reading score. This program provided financial bonuses to teachers whose students performed at least 1.5 standard deviations above the district's average teacher. Financial bonuses combined with professional development opportunities reportedly worked in combination to help recruit and maintain teachers in schools that were considered hard-to-staff.

Participants

Teachers

This study included one sixth-grade language arts teacher, Ms. Gables¹ and one seventh-grade language arts teacher, Mr. Wallace, from Lakeside Middle. The goal of this research was to develop a thick, rich description of the effective instructional decisions that reading teachers make within specific learning context (Geertz, 1973). Each teacher was specifically asked to participate based on his or her professional reputation within the school, their students' performance on the State's end of grade reading tests, and findings from the pilot study. Table 1 provides data about the teachers' backgrounds and the classes included in the study.

The sixth-grade language arts teacher, Mrs. Gables, had taught language arts for eight years. Mr. Wallace, the seventh-grade language arts teacher, had taught language arts for sixteen years. Mr. Wallace had coached the middle school's basketball team for over ten years and was the Director of Athletics at the school. Both teachers were routinely assigned classes comprised of students whose Reading End-of-Grade tests indicated the students are performing below grade level in reading comprehension. Additionally, both teachers were routinely assigned inclusion classes for the schools' Exceptional Children Program.

Ms. Gables had been at Lakeside for seven years. During this time, she taught Language Arts in sixth grade. Ms. Gables completed her Master's in Education with a concentration in reading in May 2012. Her experience at Lakeside included teaching

¹ All names and locations are pseudonyms.

regular education students, inclusion students, resource inclusion students, and academically gifted students. According to an interview with Ms. Gables during the pilot study, she was most successful with students who had special learning needs. She explained, “I tend to get more of the lower ability classes than some of the other teachers and I have a very racially diverse group.” I believe her definition of success came from the EVASS data used to rate teachers according to their students’ success on the State’s End of Grade Reading test.

Table 1. Teacher Participant Background and Classes Included in This Study

Teacher Name	Grade Level	Years of Teaching Experience	Educational Background	Characteristics of Classes
Ms. Gables	6	8	B.S. M.Ed.	Core 1: Inclusion class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 students • 19 male and 12 female • 15 African American, 3 Asian, 5 White, 3 Latino, 3 Mixed • 20-21 students have Individualized Education Plans (IEP) Core 2: Regular Education Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29 students • 17 male and 12 female • 11 African American, 4 Asian, 11 White, 3 Latino • All students passed reading end of grade test on first or second testing.
Mr. Wallace	7	16	B.S.	Core 1: Regular Education Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 students • 18 male and 13 female

Table 1. (Cont.)

Teacher Name	Grade Level	Years of Teaching Experience	Educational Background	Characteristics of Classes
Mr. Wallace	7	16	B.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 African American, 12 White, 4 Asian, 3 Latino • Several students failed EOG on first testing but passed on second testing Core 2: Academically Gifted Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 students • 17 male and 13 female • 22 White, 5 African American, 2 Asian, 1 Latino

Ms. Gables had worked with Ms. S., the sixth-grade exceptional students teacher, for the past seven years. The instructional delivery for the inclusion class observed for this study and the pilot study could be described as seamless with each teacher completing one another's sentences during the delivery of instruction, taking the lead for specific segments of the instruction without interrupting the flow of the class, and taking responsibility for the success of all the students. According to Ms. Gables, this relationship developed from mutual respect, but this respect has grown from weekly and sometimes daily planning for the instructional delivery to be used with students, the texts that best fit students' needs, and determining how students are progressing as learners.

Ms. Gables was selected for this study for a number of reasons. First, I mentored Ms. Gables during her first year at Lakeside. It was obvious from my interactions with her that her determination to help her students would drive the instruction in her

classroom. As her mentor, I realized that Ms. Gables was not only creative but also willing to work with others to improve instruction for all students. During our weekly content meeting, Ms. Gables shared new ideas for teaching and suggested new texts that were current and relevant. Second, Ms. Gables continued working with Ms. S after I left Lakeside so we stayed in touch through Ms. S. and workshops in the county. We met occasionally for coffee to talk about the trends and issues in education so I felt familiar with her teaching philosophy. Finally, Ms. Gables agreed to participate in this study with the full understanding that a significant commitment would be required of her in terms of the observations, providing information about the focal students, and helping coordinate the student and teacher interviews.

Mr. Wallace has taught at Lakeside for 16 years. During this time, he taught seventh grade exclusively. At the time of the study, Mr. Wallace taught both language arts and social studies. As the middle school basketball coach and Athletic Director, he attended most of the sporting events because he felt that it was important for the coaches and students to know that he supported their efforts.

Mr. Wallace was selected for this for a number of reasons. First, I worked with Mr. Wallace during his first years at Lakeside. It was obvious from my interactions with Mr. Wallace that his commitment to students went beyond the confines of the typical classroom setting. Mr. Wallace was in the pilot study for “Literacy That Matters” providing data that informed this study. Finally, Mr. Wallace agreed to participate in this study with the full understanding that a significant commitment would be required in

terms of the observations, providing information about the focal students, and helping coordinate the student and teacher interviews.

Students

Lakeside Middle School is an ethnically diverse school with approximately 49% of the student body comprised of African American, Asian, Latina (o), and unknown. There are 1,140 students currently enrolled with 80% of the students meeting reading proficiency on the States' end-of-grade reading test. Sixty-one percent of the students at Lakeside are considered "economically disadvantaged" according to the criteria set by No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

This study included two classes from Mrs. Gables's course listing and two classes from Mr. Wallace's course listing. The parents of all students enrolled in these classes (approximately 120 students) were invited to complete the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form. A total of 66 parents provided consent for student participation. Those students returning the IRB were invited to provide assent to participate in two reading surveys. Both surveys were selected to learn more about students' motivation to read, their reading habits and reading preferences. A total of 118 reading surveys were returned by the students in this study. Tables 2 and 3 provide demographic information about the students and the students' general positioning of themselves as readers for each of the classes.

Five students from each of the four classes were selected for more extensive study, and a total of 13 consent forms were returned for the interviews. The criteria for selecting students for interviews was based on what Maxwell (2005) describes as a

purposeful selection of participants. Invited student participants were representative of the class population according to ethnicity, gender, reading performances, and thus captured the heterogeneity of the population.

Table 2. Sixth-grade Student Participants

Student Name	Grade	Core	Gender	Ethnicity	Description
Donna	6	1	Female	African	Donna described herself as “Well, I like reading and I feel good when I am reading.”
Tommy	6	2	Male	White	Tommy described himself as “Pretty good.”
Molly	6	2	Female	Latina	Molly described herself as “um, I don’t really like reading. I struggle with reading.”
Kate	6	2	Female	White	Kate described herself as “. . . the person who loves to read because reading is one of my favorite things to do. If I have time I read.”
Connor	6	2	Male	White	Cole described himself as “I’m pretty good at reading.”
Nita	6	2	Female	African American	Nita described herself as “I don’t read as fast as I’m supposed to I guess but at a 6 th grade level.”

Teachers were asked to help select these students. Additionally, teachers were asked to submit work samples for each of the 13 students. The student interview questions were designed to find out more about the reading habits of students and the types of literacy instructional practices they identified as helpful (see Appendix E). Those

students returning parent consent were invited to sign the assent form for the interview and for their work samples to be collected. Student participants provided assent forms before completing the reading surveys and the interview.

Table 3. Seventh-grade Student Participants

Student Name	Grade	Core	Gender	Ethnicity	Description
Able	7	1	Male	Indian	Able described himself as “I like to read a lot but I’m not very good at it.”
Derrick	7	1	Male	African American	Derrick described himself as “a very focused reader and controlled reader. I like to be connected with the words in the reading.”
Ty	7	1	Male	White	Ty described himself as “I like to read Harry Potter and books about magic and I don’t think of reading as a punishment but as something someone would like to do.”
Mary	7	2	Female	White	Mary described herself as “a pretty good reader. . . . I will read for like hours and hours . . . read pretty fast and still comprehend what I am reading.”
Sue	7	2	Female	White	Sue described herself as “a very strong reader. I participate in Battle of the Books so I do a lot of reading for that.”
Larry	7	2	Male	Latino	Larry described himself as “I think I’m a good reader, I understand what I read, but I don’t read that fast, I’m not slow I’m like in the middle.”
Abhriham	7	2	Male	African American	Abhriham described himself as “on grade level . . . I always try to strive to improve and expand my vocabulary so I can understand what I’m reading.”

Data Collection

Student Surveys

This study included data from two student surveys. One of the student surveys the *Adolescent Motivation to Read* (see Appendix C) was adapted to include questions related to the students' in- and out-of-school reading habits (Kelley & Decker, 2009). Results from this survey provided data about the value students placed on reading and their motivation to read by examining their reading interests, habits, as well as their personal and academic preferences in reading (see Appendix C). Additionally, these data provided insight about how students viewed their reading abilities.

The second student survey was a variation of one used by Ivey and Broaddus (2001). These data provided confirmatory evidence for the instructional activities observed in the classroom observations, the student interviews, and the teacher interviews (Appendix D). This survey was modified to include items related to the genres students enjoyed reading and the frequency with which students read (see Appendix D).

Observations

This study included classroom observations, field notes, and videotaped evidence to document the instructional practices of each teacher during two classes each week for ten weeks. Two research assistants collected data for seven of the ten weeks. They set-up the cameras, took field notes, and collected tickets out the door. A total of 40 class sessions were included in this data source. The observations occurred weekly beginning in September and ending in December. They were not set for the same day each week, and the dates were set in collaboration with the individual teachers and the researchers.

Each observation focused on reading instruction and student engagement (see Appendix A). The class observations provided information about the reading instructional practices occurring in class to determine if these practices are those previously characterized by the International Reading Association (2000) and the principled practices of reading teachers as described by Sturtevant et al. (2006). Additionally, these data sources provided insight into how students viewed the instruction in the classroom. According to Maxwell (2005), observations can provide direct and powerful data about both the students' behavior and the teacher's behavior within the reading class.

First, the observation protocol elicited data used to examine the types of reading activities occurring in the classroom. Were these reading activities the types of reading activities that are considered meaningful by the IRA (2000), the *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy* proposed by Sturtevant et al. (2006), and by the students in the class? Secondly, the observations provided data about the engagement of students that was used to better understand how and why students might ascribe meaning to specific reading activities. Third, the observations provided data regarding what students produced during the reading activities. Finally, the field notes provided confirmatory data for both the focus students and the class during observations. These notes were used to target specific learning activities and students' responses to these activities during the students' interviews. The data gained from the student work was used to help provide clarity for the classroom observations, students' tickets out the door, students' interviews, and the teachers' interviews. Finally, the classroom observations provided information about the student and teacher interactions.

Maxwell (2005) described the direct observation of behavior as a means of providing context. He argued that observations allow researchers to draw inferences about perspectives that could not be made from interviewing alone. These data did provide information that was used to form a more complete understanding of why students ascribed meaning to specific reading activities and to the teacher's role in fostering such meanings.

Tickets out the Door

Students were asked to complete a ticket out the door at the end of five classes (see Appendix F). These tickets were designed to provide details about students' sense of themselves during personal reading or the reading instruction delivered during the class session. Tickets were anonymous and the instructions were simply, "complete the ticket out the door explaining how you feel as a reader today." According to Fontichiaro (2012), tickets out the door can be used to gauge student learning. However, this use of Tickets out the Door intentionally elicited how students identified themselves as readers. Three different designs were used at least one time in each of the four classes. The first ticket asked students to select from three photos of a student reading. The first was a happy reader, the second student looked more focused, and the third student was a frustrated or unhappy reader. Students circled the picture that described them as a reader that day. Under the photos, students were asked to explain the picture was selected. The second ticket out the door asked students to circle the adjective that best described the student as a reader today. There were 19 adjectives that included the following: surprised, broken, excited, inferior, awesome, comfortable, experienced, intelligent, bad, competent,

excellent, miserable, better, confused, gifted, passionate, connected, cautious, and respected. Again, students were asked to explain why they chose the word. The third ticket out the door asked students to draw a picture illustrating how the student felt as a reader today. Under this picture, students were asked to explain the drawing.

These data provided evidence that helped build understanding in terms of how students felt as readers on a specific day and were compared with their reading habits and preferences derived from the two reading surveys. Frequently, these data substantiated students' comments about how they felt about reading in general, how they felt about specific genres of reading, and to a lesser degree how students felt about the reading instruction in their classrooms. In combination with the student interviews, this data source provided invaluable information about students and their identities as readers.

Teacher Interviews

Teachers were interviewed one time during the study about student literacy and instructional decision-making. Teacher interviews took about one hour. These interviews were semi-structured and included nine questions that addressed literacy engagement, planning, instructional practices, and the students taught in each classroom (see Appendix B). In addition, teachers were asked about specific lessons and reading activities observed during the classroom observations. For example, those reading activities that seemed to align with or push beyond those posed by IRA (2000) became questions asked during the interviews. Additionally, teachers were asked to describe the focal students. Finally, teachers were asked to talk about their most important job as a teacher.

Teachers' behaviors and teachers' comments about their students were compared to the six critical qualities of knowledge and practice that excellent reading teachers demonstrate as described by the IRA (2000). These interviews provided information about the processes behind the instruction in the class and how these decisions were used to support students' development of reading identities and students' successful outcomes in reading.

Student Interviews

A total of 13 interviews are included in this study. The interviews included at least one student from each class. Three students were interviewed from Mr. Wallace's first core (three males) and four students were interviewed from his second core (two males and two females). One student (female) was interviewed from Mrs. Gables's first core and five students (two males and three females) from her second core. The interviews generally lasted from 30 to 45 minutes.

The student interviews provided information about the students' sense of themselves as readers and the meanings students ascribed to the reading instruction in their classroom. They also provided insight into the work samples collected from each student and data used to examine students' ascribed meaning to the views others (the IRA) consider meaningful (Appendix E). Student voice was a primary goal for this study. Students' interviews provided a more thorough understanding about what helped students make meaning from text and how teachers' instructional decisions might have influenced students' evolving reading identities.

Other Data

Work samples for the focus students were examined for additional insight into the activities observed during instruction and what both teachers and students said about these activities in terms of personal meaning. These data helped to build a better understanding about the reading instruction students described as personally important and meaningful in their classes. These data were not analyzed statistically but were used to better understand other data sources.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with a careful examination of each data source focusing on teaching practices as defined by the IRA (2000) and the principled practices set forth by Sturtevant et al. (2006). Maxwell (2005) discussed the benefit of using multiple data sources such as classroom observations and student interviews as valuable in providing a more complete picture of the reading instruction that students describe as meaningful. The data from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student interviews were transcribed before analysis begins. Data analyses occurred in the following eleven steps.

Step 1

First, the student reading surveys were compiled into a two spreadsheets for each class to provide an overall look at how students perceive reading. One spreadsheet included the data from the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey (see Appendix D) and the other displayed the Kelley and Decker (2009) survey (see Appendix C). These data were then coded using the broad categories included in the literature review that informed this research: literacy today, literacy identities, and instructional practices that motivate and

engage youth to sustain literacy. Coding the student reading surveys provided an initial sense of students' motivations for reading and their reading preferences. It was important to have this broader understanding of students' motivations and preferences as a means of analyzing the teachers' instructional practices. Understanding the potential trends for each class was important in viewing the classroom observations for first impressions. These data were used to explore the following: Do teachers make instructional decisions that students think are useful?

Step 2

I started by watching the video-taped sessions. Then, I wrote about my impressions of the class. For example, what were the students doing, were the students engaged, what was interesting, or what questions should be asked of the teachers and/or students in reference to this session. This process helped me check my analysis against the field-note observations and perceptions of my colleagues.

The videotaped observations were analyzed to begin identifying and categorizing the instructional practices considered essential by the IRA (2000) and the principled practices (Sturtevant et al., 2006) of excellent reading teachers. This process included viewing the class video-tapes and coding the data for instances of the IRA's (2000) six qualities. After each class session was analyzed, a first impression of the class was written. Writing a first impression of each class meeting focused on what the students were doing in the class, how engaged the students appeared, what instructional activities were used, and what questions could not be answered by the videotape. For example,

why did the teacher choose to use a particular text or activity? Also, this descriptive analysis identified those practices that did not fit within the IRA (2000) categories.

The classroom observations were coded initially for descriptive observations to understand the reading activities and the reading environment. Coding of these data was based on what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as chunking “words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (p. 56). From the first impression, themes began to emerge. These coded chunks were charted to determine patterns. The coded data from the classroom observations were used during the next step to determine why teachers made specific instructional decisions and how they considered the diversity of their students in making these decisions.

Additionally, notes from the videotaped sessions and the first impressions were used to ask clarifying questions during the teacher and student interviews. These data asked both teachers and students to explain the happenings of the class in greater detail.

Step 3

After coding the videotape observations and first impressions for emerging themes from both the IRA (2000) and other “beyond” the IRA (2000) qualities, the field notes of each class were read for confirmatory evidence. This process included a quick read designed to provide a feel for what the researcher observed during the class and then a more thorough read. The second read of the field notes included highlighting evidence of the themes discussed and chunking these themes within categories. These data provided confirmation for videotaped observations and gave greater context to the videotaped data. This understanding provided clarity as to what students were doing in

the class, what the teacher was doing, how teachers and students interacted, and how these interactions seemed to work together to shape students' identities as readers.

Step 4

Following the interviews, each interview was transcribed for data analysis and chunking as described in step two. Each question from the student's interview protocol was listed on a spreadsheet and each student's comment was recorded for that question. This process was completed for the questions that all students answered. Then, an "other" category was included for data that did not fit the protocol categories. After organizing the data into categories, these categories were re-read for reoccurring student comments and trends in the data. Additionally, connections to the classroom videotaped observations, field notes, and tickets out the door allowed cross data analysis.

Step 5

Each teacher interview was transcribed. Again, transcripts were read for a broad understanding of the teachers in each class. Following the first reading the transcripts were re-read and coded using the IRA qualities (2000) as well as those comments that did not fit within these categories. Finally, the coded data from the teachers' transcriptions were compared to the videotaped observation data, the field note data, the students' interview data, the students' reading interest surveys, and the tickets out the door for areas of commonalities and differences. These data led to a deeper understanding of how instructional decisions were adopted. For example, they answered questions, such as, "How did the teachers change instruction to fit the needs of the students in the class or

find ways to support the reading identities of those students even when these students did not love to read?”

Step 6

Using the data from the classroom observations and the teacher interviews, the data were examined for ways that participant teachers adapted or resisted the criteria set forth by the IRA (2000). The data were initially analyzed using a checklist of IRA standards and principled practices to determine which classroom observations and teacher interviews fit within these standards. Knowing that teachers negotiate administrative, community, and professional goals within the structured field of school, the data sources were also analyzed for other ways that adaptation, compliance, and resistance occurred. Finally, the data sources were examined for how resistance occurred in terms of instructional planning and implementation. For example, this analysis addressed questions, such as “Did the teachers comply with the mandates of the school district and/or the state without question, or did they adapt or resist these mandates in ways that were articulated as beneficial for their students, and if so, in what ways did they adapt or resist?”

Step 7

Tickets out the door asked students to describe how they felt as readers at the end of specific class sessions. Teachers were asked to have students complete the ticket and write their blinded identifier on the ticket, which allowed me to examine a student’s responses across time.

Each of the tickets was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis. These data worked in conjunction with the students' interviews, students' reading surveys, videotaped observations, and field notes to build a more complete picture of how students in these classes felt as readers. These data examined how students felt about particular reading activities, reading preferences, and reading habits. The data provided information about students on a particular day as well as a view of the same student or students across the ten-week period. They were not analyzed quantitatively; instead I searched for trends in the tickets out the door, the students' interviews, and reading surveys to help understand how students in these classes felt as readers.

Step 8

In the eighth step, each of the data sources was analyzed for potential relationships. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) described triangulation as the process of converging, corroborating, and actually corresponding with the data sources as a means to ensure validity of qualitative data. Each of the instructional practices described by the IRA (2000) was listed along with a category for practices that did not fit them. The students' interviews, students' reading interest surveys, and students' tickets out the door were used to examine how students described those reading practices activities that were helpful and those that were not helpful. This method of analysis provided a more complete understanding of how a particular student's interview comments about classroom instruction, his/her reading survey comments, multiple tickets out the door, and the classroom observation notes explained the reading identities these

focus students performed in the classroom or expressed through surveys and interviews in relation to their tickets out the door.

Step 9

The multiple forms of data were re-read and trends were highlighted to form a more thorough understanding of how the instructional practices in a particular classroom may have influenced the reading identities of the students in that class. This step included all data sources. For example, the student surveys, student interviews, and tickets out the door were examined again for comments that might link to instructional practices or to the teacher interview transcripts regarding adaptation of instruction or resistance to mandated practices. An emphasis was placed on how students described the meaningfulness of specific reading instruction in the classroom. This provided more information about the fluidity of students' identities as readers.

Step 10

This step examined all of the data sources for one teacher participant creating a case study for each teacher. The data sources for each teacher were combined to build a more complete picture of each classroom. The students' reading interest surveys, students' interviews, tickets out the door, and the videotaped observation notes were analyzed to better understand how the students from each class viewed reading from a personal perspective and from the perspective of a student participating in the instructional activities of the class. The student voices section provided the introduction for each teacher's classrooms. The second section for each case combined the videotaped classroom observational notes, the coded field notes, and the teacher's interview to better

understand how each teacher's practices might or might not have mirrored those practices described by the IRA (2000) as the critical qualities of excellent reading teachers.

Additionally, these data helped define ways in which the teacher worked within the mandates of their school and state's expectations.

Step 11

A cross-case comparison examined both cases for common themes and the ways in which the cases differed. Each case was re-read for this analysis. These data were analyzed with respect to grade level, the literature, and the IRA (2000) criteria. The data are presented using the students' voices as a background for examining how the instructional decisions of each teacher worked in support of their students' identities as readers. Each case will include the students' perspectives about reading, the teacher's instructional practices in relationship to the IRA's (2000) six critical qualities of excellent reading teachers, and finally an analysis of other factors that help to understand the instructional decisions of each class. Ms. Gables's case will be presented in Chapter IV, and Mr. Wallace's case will be presented in Chapter V. The final chapter will include a discussion of both cases including the common threads, as well as those characteristics that are specific to each case.

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDY ONE: TWO SIXTH-GRADE CLASSES WHERE STUDENTS CLAIM, “I LIKE READING. I FEEL A LOT BETTER READING THAN BEFORE.”

This chapter will present two diverse sixth-grade classes taught by Ms. Gables. The two classes will form one case and the data analysis will explain how the teacher’s instructional decisions worked to support the reading identities of the students in these classes. The case will be presented in three sections. First, the students interviewed for this study will be used to build a first-person narrative explaining how students in these classes viewed reading and the reading instruction they encountered. Second, the teacher’s reading instruction will be analyzed in relation to the IRA’s (2000) six critical qualities of excellent reading teachers. Finally, the classroom instruction and teacher’s instructional decisions will be analyzed to better understand those classroom phenomenon not explained by the IRA’s (2000) critical qualities.

A total of 60 students from two 6th-grade language arts classes taught by Ms. Gables are included in this study. Both classes represent the diversity of the school with 26 African American, 16 White, 7 Asian, 6 Latino, and 3 Multi-racial students. The classes included 36 males and 24 females. Twenty-six students completed the reading surveys (see Appendix C and D) providing information about what students enjoy reading and how they feel about reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Kelley & Decker, 2009). Each class was observed and videotaped one time each week for ten weeks.

Researchers collected field notes during these observations (see Appendix A).

Additionally, students completed a ticket out the door for five of the ten observations (see Appendix F). These tickets asked students to describe themselves as readers either through selecting an adjective, circling a picture, or drawing a picture to represent how they felt as a reader at the end of that class period. Six students were interviewed from these classes; one from core one and five from core two. Using these data, this research examines how students in these classes see themselves as readers. The voices of the six students interviewed will be used as the first person narrative describing the classroom. These voices are supplemented with data from the tickets out the door (323 total), reading surveys (52 total), and field notes (20 classes total).

The student interview protocol (see Appendix E) was used during each interview, but students were also asked about their reading interest surveys, classroom observations, and tickets out the door. These data show that students described good readers as students who love to read, students who read fluently, students who understand what they are reading, and students who understand good readers achieve success in school and life. In describing what it meant to be good readers, data began to cluster around the reading identities students enacted within the classroom observations, student reading surveys, and tickets out the door. Four over-arching yet continually shifting identities emerged: students who love to read, students who describe themselves as pretty good readers even though they may not love it, and students who say they struggle as readers but are getting better. Within these identities, students demonstrated fluidity depending on the classroom practices, how students perceived good reading within the context of the class, and in

terms of each student's personal reading preferences. Students took up identities that shifted sometimes in small ways and sometimes in more dramatic ways, which seemed to be nuanced by the student's purpose.

Sixth-grade Students See Good Readers As . . .

According to the six students interviewed (Kate, Molly, Tommy, Donna, Connor, and Nita), good readers seemed to share some common qualities. These commonalities were supported by data collected from 52 completed reading surveys (Kelley & Decker, 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001) and 323 tickets out the door. Together these data provided a rich data source for better understanding how students perceived good readers at the time of the study. The data analysis presented here examines the standards students set for themselves in terms of how they perceived good reading and those standards set for them by others. These others may include, but are not limited to, their parents, teachers, other students, and the media. The data examined here will focus primarily on teachers and students, but some students mentioned parents and media. It is important to understand how students set standards for reading, and more importantly good reading, to then build upon our understanding how students position themselves as readers.

“Good Readers Love to Read.”

Kate and Molly described good readers as students who love to read. Throughout Kate's interview, her student reading surveys, and five tickets out the door, Kate positioned herself as an avid reader who loved to spend time reading. Kate reported reading at night before bed, in class, and traveling in the car. According to Kate, “I think I would be like the person who loves to read because reading is one of my favorite things

to do. If I have time I read.” When asked to talk about the good readers in her class, Kate responded:

There is this boy [pause]. I can’t remember his name. He likes to read nonfiction, like right now he is reading a book about the rules of poker. And Jolle, most of the books she reads are thick. And me. Some of them [my books] are thick and some aren’t.

Kate was quick to clarify that thickness was not a requirement for being a good reader, but it seemed Kate was cognizant of book size. This seemed to be true for other students included in this study. Students recognized that thicker books could suggest good reading in order to navigate more complex story lines or to simply persevere. Additionally, Kate included a student who was reading nonfiction in her list of good readers. Kate’s reading preference was fiction, yet she occasionally reported reading nonfiction. It seemed that Kate may have believed that choosing to read nonfiction is also an important attribute for a good reader.

While Molly reportedly struggled as a reader, she described good readers using similar language:

The ones (good readers) that understand most of the books. Um, there’s Allie because she’s had lots of books and she’s understood them. Kate is a good reader because she loves books and she’s always checking them out and she understands them. Katrina because she is like Kate she reads a lot and she always books.

Ticket out the door data confirmed both Molly and Kate’s descriptions of good readers.

On October 25 and November 7, one student described himself as “a very focused reader” and said, “Well, it’s like when I like a book I can’t get out of it.”

Students who described good reading as “a love for reading” consistently connected the time spent reading as important. Students also described good reading in terms of reading both fiction and nonfiction, how thick a book was, and understanding what was read.

“Good Readers Understand What They Are Reading.”

Tommy, Molly, and Kate described good readers as readers who understand what they read. Tommy reported that students who were good readers not only like to read, they understood the book and could do so because they understand big words. Tommy described himself as a pretty good reader, but he did not often read for pleasure. Tommy’s interview response was confirmed through the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey. Tommy reported reading “sometimes” but “if it’s a good book then I will.”

Several students described vocabulary as important to understanding what they read. Students were asked about this on the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey, “When I come to a word I do not know, I can _____.” Students were given the following choices: “almost always able to figure it out, sometimes able to figure it out, almost never able to figure it out, or never able to figure it out.” The data reported nine students were “almost always able to figure out the word,” another nine were “sometimes able to figure it out,” and seven students “almost never figured out the word.” These data point to the importance students attached to vocabulary. Based on the videotaped observations and the field notes, vocabulary practice of some type routinely consumed from 15 to 20 minutes each day in these classes. Students seemed to learn that vocabulary

was an important part of comprehending text and that comprehending text plays a role in reading for pleasure.

Molly said, “Well, it’s where you understand the book and you feel like you love the book and you can see everything in your mind that’s happening.” Molly spoke enthusiastically about the students she felt were good readers in her class. Kate’s description of good readers seemed to encompass Molly and Tommy’s view. Kate viewed understanding as:

Kate: To be a good reader you: 1) need to be able to understand the books, and 2) not only be able to understand but kind of get the gist of what’s going on. You don’t just need to read because the teacher says.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Kate: You need to get what the book is saying. Some kids read but can’t tell you a thing about the book so you need to be able to read so you can tell other people about it.

Data from tickets out the door confirmed Kate’s, Molly’s, and Tommy’s views. On October 25, one student described this attribute of good readers as “because I love to read and to just see what’s new.” On November 13, another student described understanding as “I could understand all of the book I was reading.” Students seemed to perceive understanding as central to good reading. Students’ descriptions of what it meant to be a good reader differed some, but the importance of understanding what was read was prevalent. Both students who positioned themselves as struggling readers and students who positioned themselves as good readers articulated the importance of “understanding”

the text and commented on the importance of this concept to their success as readers today and in their futures.

“Good Readers Can Go to College.”

Students seemed to connect good reading skills with success in school and their futures. Donna repeatedly talked about how her reading translated into her future successes. “Well, I think that if I can read good then I can get a good education and a scholarship to maybe Lakeside University.” Nita equated her success as a reader to her future, “It means that I can be successful and in many ways because if you don’t know how to read . . . reading is everywhere, there are words everywhere.” When asked to explain success, she explained that, “When I grow up I want to be a doctor or a middle school teacher.” Connor described reading as a tool necessary for a “good education and a good job.” According to Connor, reading could help him achieve this goal. Connor continued by explaining that good reading scores on his reading end of grade test could help him get in “higher classes,” meaning advanced reading classes.

Twenty-two of the 26 students completing the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading interest survey reported that as an adult reading would be important at least “some of the time” or “all of the time.” The tickets out the door added to this data as students repeatedly described reading as a means of future success. The following are examples of four students who believe their reading holds power:

Student one: “I feel like books have power inside them.” (November 19)

Student two: “Great because reading is very important and fun it helps you get smarter and a good education.” (November 19)

Student three: “fun because reading is great because you can get a great education” (November 13)

Student four: “I choose this picture [happy] because I liked to leran and read and go into good colleg.” (October 25)

Videotaped evidence confirmed that students were engaged in a business like atmosphere where reading and writing seemed to be valued. Students worked in small groups, discussed texts as a class, read independently, and talked with the teacher on a regular basis about their reading. These data suggested students may have seen their daily investment in reading and writing as a necessary step in preparing for their future.

“Good Readers Read Fluently Both Silently and Out Loud.”

Donna and Nita described good readers as fluent. Donna described her oral reading as a means of helping others in the class during reading activities. “We (fluent oral readers) read, and when other people in the room who don’t really get it start to get it little by little.” She also spoke enthusiastically about this helping role. She believed that working with knowledgeable others helped the development of reading for students in this class (Vygotsky, 1986). Nita described one classmate she felt was a good reader because of her ability to read out loud. Nita could not separate oral and silent reading. She felt that as a reader both forms of reading must work together. “Yes, if I don’t . . . I feel like if I don’t read better out loud . . . I feel like I can’t read. So I will practice at home and with my cousin, I will ask her to be the teacher . . . I’m starting to get better because I’m starting to reader better.”

For Kate reading orally had a different meaning, “To be able to read the book out loud and you need to read it not fast but slowly and express yourself.” It seemed Kate,

Donna and Nita's views of silent and oral reading served different purposes. Donna's oral reading helped others, while Nita's helped improve her silent reading. Kate's oral reading was important but seemed more focused on how the reading served her purpose as a reader.

Six of the 26 students completing the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reading interest survey described reading out loud as "important." Fourteen of the 26 students completing the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey expressed concern about reading out loud. Students described their oral reading abilities as follows: 3 as "poor" oral readers, 11 as "okay," 8 as "good," and only 3 as "very good." These data are challenged by students' perceptions of their silent reading. According to the same students completing the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey, students are much more confident in their silent reading skills. Question 7 of this survey asked, "When I am reading by myself, I understand ___." Fifteen students reported understanding "almost everything they read," 8 reported understanding "some of what they read," and no students reported "almost none" or "none of what they read." These findings are interesting because students view reading orally as an important quality for good readers. Students seem cognizant of how oral reading is perceived by other students in their class.

Elementary schools keep running records of students' reading skills and frequently check fluency rates. The students interviewed from these classes were cognizant of reading rates and these rates were connected to meanings that depended on the student's personal perceptions of reading. While oral reading is important, these data suggested that students' perceptions of oral reading might be as important as silent

reading. If students felt they are being judged as a good reader based on oral reading, these perceptions could play a significant role in how students position themselves as readers.

According to the students in these classes, being a good reader was defined by the individual student based on students' perceptions. When students described "good readers" in their classes, they generally described readers in the context of independent reading by making comments such as: these students read thicker books, read all the time, or understood what they were reading. Students did not refer to "good readers" by their contributions to class discussions or to how their reading attributes influenced the climate of the classroom.

Reading Identities: How Sixth-grade Students Position Themselves as Readers

Three clusters appeared from the analysis of data sources regarding how students situated themselves as readers. First, students who love to read. Second, students who situated their reading as "getting better," but they did not love it. Third, students who believed they struggled with reading but also believed they were getting better. Within each cluster, students' identities as readers could be seen as fluid in that, students might attach positive attributes to their reading dependent upon the context of the reading assignment, their reading preferences, or how they felt on a particular day.

These analyses will examine the three clusters of reading identities by focusing on how students described these identities. Specifically, how classroom practices could have influenced these reading identities, how context could have influenced these reading identities and the role of students' reading preferences were examined.

“I Love to Read!”

Kate and Donna talked about reading with passion and expressed positive feelings about reading. Kate passionately spoke of her life-long love for reading, and how her parents had significantly influenced her love for reading. Donna also quickly stated, “Well, I like reading and I feel good when I am reading.” She said, “Reading makes me feel good. It makes me feel . . . I don’t know how to explain it . . . just I feel good.”

In reviewing the videotape, both Kate and Donna were consistently engaged and eager to participate in reading activities. The type of participation however was different. Videotaped evidenced revealed that Donna seemed focused on class discussion and the teacher’s instruction. For example, as Ms. Gable’s moved about the room providing instruction, Donna pivoted so that she was always looking at the teacher. Occasionally, Donna raised her hand to answer questions or seek help. The field notes for this class indicated that Donna did participate orally in class, but Kate was much more active in seeking opportunities to share. The videotaped observations and field notes confirmed that Kate sought opportunities to answer questions, read orally, and share her experiences with good books. Kate’s confidence as a reader was present in all data sources. Donna had been in the United States for only one year. She shared that, “like in Africa if you miss a question or fail a test, they like get a stick and hit you, but I never got hit.” This comment suggested that Donna might be more reluctant to volunteer for fear of being reprimanded. Donna’s excitement about reading, however, was present during the student interview, student reading surveys, and her tickets out the door. Students who loved

reading described the desire to read and to participate in reading related activities as being central to their reading experiences.

Donna and Kate had different reading backgrounds, Kate as a life-long reader, and Donna as a reader who has grown into reading within the last few years. Donna explained she had received tutoring, was now reading better, and loved it. In talking about her reading, Donna connected with a class reading of Albert Einstein, in the following:

Well, see at first Albert Einstein wasn't a good reader and that's how I was. I wasn't a good reader when I was like eight I wasn't a good reader, but then I started reading things over and over and I started to get smarter and smarter in reading. The teachers tutored me and I became a better reader.

Students who loved reading were eager to share their reading experiences and the books they loved during interviews, reading interest surveys, and tickets out the door. In addition, the active participation of the students noted from the videotaped observations and the field notes support the idea that students who love to read invest time and energy in this pursuit.

Reading practices and reading identities. Every student interviewed for this study indicated that independent reading time was important to them. The tickets out the door were often about the self-selected novels students were reading. The following examples were selected from the 323 tickets out the door to demonstrate the role of independent reading and students' self-selected reading:

Student 1: (November 13) I love the book I'm reading

Student 2: (November 26) I pick awesome because I fell [feel] good about reading the book Scott Pendle

Student 3: (November 7) My drawing shows that I am happy about what I'm reading. I just read bigger books

It seemed important for students who identified themselves as happy readers to have independent reading time. In reviewing the videotaped classes and field notes, student participation was high during this independent reading time. I would argue that given the time to read, the choice of reading material, coaching (using the reading logs), and time to share books that students in these classes came to connect positive feelings with reading. According to the November 13 video, students seemed to be engaged in their independent reading time. Additionally, the field notes included the following:

Teacher tells students to stop [reading] and tells them "if you have a book worth recommending, talk to your table [group] about it." After the group sharing, three students shared books with the class. Each student tells about their books. Kids all sigh when Ms. Gables commented, "That's it for today."

Students described personal reading as important and as a valued part of class. Sharing books with a group and with the class could be one reason students find this meaningful. Students spoke passionately about the books they were reading and this enthusiasm created a positive atmosphere for reading. According to results from the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey, students reported that sharing good books was something they did on their own. While only 5 reported never sharing a good book with a

friend, 14 students reported that sharing a good book with a friend was something they would do often or sometimes.

The context of reading and students' reading identities. Data analysis suggested a connection between the context of reading and how students felt. On October 25, classroom instruction focused on a nonfiction passage about Roberto Clemente. As a class, students finished reading orally about Roberto Clemente and completed a character analysis graphic organizer. Following this, students read a poem about leadership. On November 13, students worked on a group picture book focusing on leadership. This activity was the culminating activity for a thematic unit on leadership. Kate and Donna reported that they enjoyed these classes. In particular, Donna felt reading about leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, John F. Kennedy, and Roberto Clemente was important because she too would like to change the world.

Kate and Donna's positive feelings were shared by 40% of the students completing a ticket out the door on October 25 and November 13. Students selected from three pictures. One picture depicted a student who appeared frustrated or unhappy, the center picture was a comfortable reader, and the last picture was a happy reader (see Appendix F). In addition to circling the picture that described their reading on these dates, students were asked to explain in writing. Three students were selected to represent the other students who circled the picture of a happy reader. Their comments included:

Student 1: cause I'd enjoyed today's reading.

Student 2: I love to read it takes you on adventures and it is very fun to read.

Student 3: Because today I understood the article and the poem.

These tickets out the door suggested that students did find reading about leadership as positive and important and when they understood or related to the texts they were reading.

Several students described the picture book activity as important to their reading and writing. Students seemed to find meaning in the leadership texts (previously discussed), and then used that meaning to work with a partner or in a small group on a picture book about leadership. Kate spoke with insight about this experience and its significance:

Interviewer: Could you tell me about the book you made?

Kate: Well, it's our book and you were supposed to show something about leadership and it's a picture book. So, she [Ms. Gables] read us the *Little Engine that Could* and showed us how it showed leadership. So my partner is Shay and we made a book about a vacation in Hawaii and these two girls go and they find an ad for beach party and they end up going and choking on cupcakes and Superman comes and saves them so the leader in the story is Superman.

Interviewer: So what leadership quality is Superman showing?

Kate: He is showing he cares.

Interviewer: He cares and who came up with that idea?

Kate: Both of us. She wanted Superman, and I wanted Hawaii so we smushed it together.

Interviewer: You came up with the idea together. How important do you think it is for people to work together?

Kate: I think it's important because when you get older and you get a job you're going to have to work with people and if you don't know how you probably won't have a job for very long.

Interviewer: Well, how often do you work together in class?

Kate: In reading you have to work with other people so quite often.

Kate's experience with this project demonstrated several important life skills. First, Kate and Shay applied their understanding of leadership (kindness) to their picture book. Second, they worked together for a common goal. Finally, Kate understood the importance of working with others as an important skill for her future.

The context for reading and the text selections may be the connection for students who love to read. While Donna and Kate described reading about great leaders as pleasurable and meaningful, students more often referred to their personal reading on the tickets out the door. Field notes and videotaped evidence provided the richest data source for the contexts in which students ascribe positive connections as readers. Video evidence suggested that students were generally engaged during both the Roberto Clemente and the students' work on their picture books. What is starkly obvious between these videos was the context for learning. The Roberto Clemente lesson was teacher directed with Ms. Gable asking questions and orchestrating the discussion. Students were on task and engaged, but the level of engagement was limited to one student answering the teacher's question at any given time. The picture book lesson was completely different. Ms. Gables set up the expectations for the class period, discussed the expected outcomes, and students worked in groups. The room was noisy, but students were on task.

Yes, reading preferences matter! Students' interviews, tickets out the door, and videotaped observations helped to explain the ways in which students' preferences as readers impacted their engagement with reading and how they felt about reading at any

given time. Videotaped observations suggested that students' preferences for fiction and nonfiction influenced how students viewed reading on specific days. For example, when students read the non-fiction piece about Roberto Clemente, student engagement was visibly lower than when students were reading fictional texts such as *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Students consistently described enjoying fiction. Kate's excerpt chronicled the habits of an avid reader as she described a wide range of reading preferences with passion:

Kate: I like fiction. Like mysteries or adventures.

Interviewer: Can you think of some mysteries and adventures you have read this year?

Kate: *Airborn* (Oppel, 2004), *Everlost* (Shusterman, 2009) and *Just Ella* (Haddix, 1999).

Interviewer: A favorite?

Kate: Probably *Everlost*. It's my favorite because it shows that one person can do something; it doesn't have to be you and someone else. It can be just you.

While Kate preferred reading fiction, her love for reading and her skill as a reader afforded Kate the option of trying different genres. According to Ms. Gables, Kate read above grade level and was open to trying new and different texts. Kate was also on the Battle of the Books team for her school.

Donna reported enjoying fiction and especially series. She loved series like *The Dork Diaries* (Russell, 2009-2012) and *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kenney, 2007-2012) because "the girl writes funny things that happen. Like how her life is and that she is

going to a new school, and I like that.” Donna commented on the similarity of these series, “they are funny and they are diaries just a boy is telling one and a girl the other.”

Generally, the students who ascribed such positive feelings to reading frequently described these attributes though their personal reading preferences:

Student 1: Because I love the book I’m reading

Student 2: I love to read it takes you on adventures and it is very fun

Student 3: I feel goood because I like to read so many book. Every day.

Student 4: It [reading] makes me want to shout cause books are AWSOME!

Students who reported a love for reading talked about how reading was an “adventure” most often associated with fictional texts, but some students reported nonfiction texts that were enjoyable. Sometimes students reported positive feelings that seemed contextualized (leadership readings or the picture book), some were about the experiences of reading (“takes you on an adventure”), and some were more generalized (“makes me want to shout”).

“I May Not Love Reading, But I Am Getting Better.”

Connor and Tommy situated themselves as readers who did not love reading, but both students believed they were getting better. When students situated themselves as improving they could mean several different things. For example, the tickets out the door indicated that sometimes students described their reading at the end of one class as “better,” and at the end of another class “awesome.” The reading interest surveys indicated that students might have not loved reading but could see its value. This fluidity

was sometimes connected to what students were doing during class and at other times no clear connection could be made.

The students' interviews, the tickets out the door, and the videotaped classes provided overwhelming evidence that students felt they were improving as readers. Comments from tickets out the door and the interviews suggested the performance of reading identities through the lens of "getting better." Yet, within this lens reading identity was sometimes dependent on the structure of the class, how students perceived good reading within the context of the class, and almost always through the reading preferences of the students. For example, during the video for October 30, students read independently for approximately 20 minutes. According to the field notes, Ms. Gables asked students to "record your title and the number of pages you just read." Students were then instructed to choose one of four questions to answer on their reading log. Ms. Gables modeled how she would answer one of the questions using the novel she was reading. Students were instructed to use support from the novel to explain their thinking, and they wrote in response to their reading for almost 10 minutes. Several students asked Ms. Gables and the other teachers (two) to read what they written. The video evidence suggested that students were highly engaged and asked if they could continue reading the next day. While this does not directly connect to students' improving as readers, it does suggest that students are motivated to read. According to Hidi and Renninger (2006), one's level of interest has a powerful influence on learning and in this case reading.

Tommy described his reading as "pretty good" during the student interview. On October 30, Tommy selected "better" to describe his reading. During this class, students

read from their self-selected novel for approximately 20 minutes and then read with a partner from a novel selected by the teacher. This particular class provided students with approximately 50 minutes of reading time. Tommy's opportunities to define himself as getting "better" could be attributed to the amount of time available for actual reading during this class session.

Connor said, "I guess I'm pretty good at reading" but he did not choose to read often outside of school. Yet, when Ms. Gable's asked students to stop self-selected reading he thought, "Yeah, sometimes I'm just where am I? Because I picture it and what's happening and then she tells us to stop reading and I'm like wow."

Data from October 30 revealed that 23 students completing tickets out the door described their reading as either "better" or "comfortable." Two students described their reading as "connected" and thirteen students selected "excellent," "excited," or "experienced." On November 17 and November 29, a total of 36 students described their reading as "better." Four students were selected to detail what reading "better" meant to the students in these classes:

Student 1: Because I do my reading log almost every night and I read more than 30 minutes.

Student 2: Because I am getting a lot better than I was a month ago.

Student 3: Every day I can read further every day.

Student 4: Because I'm getting better with my words.

Additionally, I used tickets out the door to examine context from October 30 and November 26. On October 30, students read independently for approximately 20 minutes

and then read from a teacher-selected novel with a partner. On November 26, students worked on vocabulary instruction and their picture book about leadership. In looking at the same students' tickets out the door, the fluidity of students' reading identities began to emerge and was at least partially influenced by the classroom context.

Student 1: October 30: "Better" Because I felt like I've done better as a reader.

Student 1: November 26: "Awesome" I felt like I understood everything.

Student 2: October 30: "Comfortable" because I feel that I am comfortable and good at it.

Student 2: November 26: "Confused" I am confused b/c we didn't even read

Student 3: October 30: "Bad" I choose bad because sometime I can't said the word.

Student 3: November 26: "Better" I read BETTER because I feel like I read good.

These data suggested that students' identities as readers are fluid and these identities are performed differently in different situations. I would argue that the context of this classroom provided opportunities for students to perform different identities in these different situations, thereby offering multiple paths for these emerging identities to develop. The ways in which students described their reading seemed to depend on the activity, how the activity was completed, and the students' personal purposes. Student one used a more positive descriptor when working on the picture book. Student two was "comfortable" on October 30, which was the day more independent reading was provided. Student three seemed to benefit from working with a partner.

Reading practices and reading identities. Students described how the reading practices and class structure helped them become better readers. For example, students

were required to read daily and complete a reading log detailing the pages read and answering some type of question about this reading (see Appendix G). Connor explained how the reading log was helping him become a better reader: “In fifth grade I didn’t read any book(s) because we didn’t have a log, but I would read some and just stop but I think now I actually like reading some stuff.” The structure required by this reading log seemed to help Connor actually finish a book, something he had not previously accomplished. Interestingly, Connor expressed displeasure in completing the reading log, but when asked if he felt the log was beneficial in any way, he hesitated and responded that writing about his reading made him more accountable for his independent reading. These data suggested that Connor’s identity as a reader may have been shifting slightly from that of a student who does not like to read all to a student who “actually like(s) reading some stuff.” As he indicated, the reading log, as a classroom practice, contributed to his changing perception of himself as a reader and the unexpected enjoyment of reading.

During the student interview, students were asked to talk about what they liked and disliked about reading in the classroom. Tommy believed increasing his vocabulary was helping him as a reader and described enjoyment learning “synonyms and antonyms” for his vocabulary. Tommy saw a connection between the vocabulary instruction of the classroom and his reading “because I’m doing better. I’m reading bigger words and understanding it [text] better.”

While Tommy found vocabulary to be helpful, he did not believe that reading as a class was helpful. The following excerpt explains his thinking about reading as a whole class:

Interviewer: Okay why do you not like reading as a class?

Tommy: It takes up so much time.

Interviewer: Why?

Tommy: She [The classroom teacher] picks readers and they are slow and to me it's just better to read on your own or with a partner so things go faster.

Students seemed to view the practice of a modified round robin with similar feelings. Although students generally felt whole class reading did not help them as readers, other data pointed to the positive effects of partner reading, group reading, and teacher read aloud. For example, 19 of the 26 students completing the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reading interest survey indicated that reading texts with a partner or a small group was important to their reading. The Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey reported that 10 of the 26 students surveyed would like for their teacher to read out loud every day or almost every day. Another 15 students would like their teacher to read out loud "once in a while" and only two students "never" wanted their teacher to read out loud. The Ivey and Broaddus (2001) student reading survey did not overwhelmingly support these data, but when students were asked about the reading activities they enjoyed most from a menu of activities 7 of 24 students indicated enjoyment from teachers' reading out loud. These data suggested that Tommy is not the only student who has mixed feelings about read-alouds by his teacher, who is ostensibly a fluent oral reader.

The context of the class and reading identities. Student interviews provided evidence that a supportive reading environment was important to students' reading

identities. During the student's interviews, Connor described independent reading as an important part of class. Even though Connor described himself as someone who did not enjoy reading, he said that when reading time ended he felt like, ". . . I'm just where am I? Because I picture it [the story] and what's happening and then she tells us to stop reading, and I'm like wow!"

On October 30, researchers noted the environment of the classroom as "All students are reading quietly, as are the two teachers." Building a context for reading identities to flourish seemed to be a consistent pattern in these classes. Students did not move around the room and the number of engaged students seemed to increase each week. More importantly, students referred to this time and the opportunity for choice as important. These data suggested that providing an atmosphere that not only encouraged but also actively promoted reading might have increased their engagement in reading. In conjunction with the independent reading time, students were asked to read at home and complete a reading log at home. Although students reportedly did not always enjoy the writing component of the reading log, they did find it helpful to write about what they were reading.

Yes, reading preferences matter! Connor and Tommy often described reading through the lens of their personal preferences as readers. Although Tommy described himself as a pretty good reader, when asked how often Tommy read without being asked he responded, "Not that often, but if it's a good book then I will." Tommy articulated how these personal preferences guided his reading in the following:

Interviewer: What do you like to read?

Tommy: Sports books and nonfiction.

Interviewer: You like nonfiction? Do you like magazines?

Tommy: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you think of some sports books you enjoy? What one was about?

Tommy: *Tough to Tackle* (Christopher, 1971).

Interviewer: What did you like about that book?

Tommy: He [character's name] never gave up.

Tommy also enjoyed other fictional novels written by Sharon Draper, *Forged by Fire* (Draper, 1997) and *Tears of a Tiger* (Draper, 1994). Tommy described Draper's style of writing as being similar to that of a mystery because he did not know what would happen next.

During the student interview, Tommy's reading identity seemed to shift and actually expand as we talked about different genres of reading and different media. Initially, Tommy reported reading only "sports books and nonfiction" but later in the interview he talked in a more spirited tone about writing a children's book with his partner and the novel, *Three Cups of Tea* (Mortenson & Oliver-Relin, 2007). It seemed that Tommy benefited from reading and writing with others. According to Tommy, he enjoyed reading sports magazines because they helped him "visualize" the story. Connor's reading preferences seemed limited to fiction until he started talking about *Three Cups of Tea* (Mortenson & Oliver-Relin, 2007) and explained that he felt the

authors were big “liars.” Ten of the 26 students surveyed reported reading magazines on a regular basis. Students often claimed to prefer only fiction or nonfiction but during the interviews students identified with multiple types of texts depending on the context and their purpose for reading.

“I Struggle With Reading, But I’m Getting Better.”

Molly and Nita described themselves as readers who struggled, but they both believed they were improving as readers. Molly reported that she had struggled throughout elementary school as a reader. Nita focused solely on her struggles as an oral reader. In this study, students described “struggling” or feeling “frustrated” with reading in terms of the classroom practices, students’ personal perspectives about how good reading sounds, and when the text did not meet their personal preferences.

Data from the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey indicated that 6 of the 26 students completing the reading interest survey also reported reading as “difficult” or “hard” and another 9 felt they were just “okay” (6) or “poor” (3) readers. Molly consistently described herself as a struggling reader, explaining, “I struggle with reading. When I read a book, I don’t get the main idea. So I have to read and re-read the book a couple of times to understand it.” She understood that because of her reading struggles some type of reading strategies were needed and her primary means of understanding a text was re-reading. Molly received tutoring and felt this tutoring along with the classroom instruction was helping her, but her previous reading struggles seemed to be a source of her sense of herself as a reader. Nita’s struggle with oral reading was also shared by other students. The Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation

survey asked students about reading out loud, “When I read out loud, I am ____.” Three students described their oral reading as “poor,” 12 thought they were “okay,” 8 were “good,” and 3 were “very good.” These results indicate that oral reading is stressful for some students, and that students who struggled with reading need extra support in order to form a meaningful connection with texts.

Reading practices and reading identities. Students who described themselves as struggling readers seemed to be in agreement with the structures that were helpful and those that were not. Students described reading in small groups or with a partner as helpful. Whole class reading or a modified version of round robin was not helpful. According to students, “It took too long.” Molly explained that reading with a partner or in a small group was easier due to her perceived struggles as a reader.

Reading with a partner or with a small group seemed very important to students who described themselves as struggling. The round robin format seemed to highlight those students who lacked either the skill or the confidence to read in this setting. Nita reported, “Yeah, sometimes when I read out loud in class I have trouble saying the words and skip over some words.” When asked to describe reading out loud, she replied, “I’m one of those people . . . I don’t like people staring at me. If I’m not talking to you don’t look at me, so I guess because everybody is looking at me I get nervous.” Research on round robin reading confirmed its negative impact on reading outcomes (Ivey, 1999; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Nita and Molly identified instructional practices such as re-reading or reading with a partner as beneficial.

The context of the class and reading identities. The context for reading seemed critical for Molly and Nita. Both students referred to the texts read and how these texts were read in terms of their struggles as readers. When asked about what Molly liked or disliked about her class, the response:

Interviewer: Tell me what you like most about reading in your classroom?

Molly: Um, (pause) I don't think anything.

Interviewer: Do you like language arts class?

Molly: Well, I get to learn more about the characters in the books that we're learning about. [This was in reference to the unit on "Perspectives and Viewpoints" and included texts about Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and John F. Kennedy.]

Interviewer: Well, what do you like least about reading in your classroom?

Molly: That we read on . . . I think it's just like reading hard things and trying to figure out the main idea.

Interviewer: Do you connect with the characters in the stories, Molly?

Molly: No, I have to reread it to understand it. I have trouble remembering what I've read . . . it's kind of hard for me to imagine it only certain types of books like the mysteries and scary stories.

Molly's challenges in reading have haunted her since entering school. The negative attention to her reading difficulties certainly influenced her Molly's reading identities. She had been in tutoring and received extra help for years. She was enrolled in Read 180, a scripted, remedial reading program, this year and believed it was helping, but "it is still hard." Molly's voice was soft during the interview. I told Molly that there was no right or wrong answer to the interview questions. I believe Molly's timidity was at least in part

due to her struggles as a reader. Although Molly consistently described her reading as struggling, she did speak passionately about two novels. This suggested Molly may have found other ways to see herself as reader in spite of her other challenges.

During the student interviews, Nita only expressed concern about reading orally. Her identities as a reader shifted depending on how she was asked to read a text. Nita explained this in the following way:

Interviewer: Describe yourself as a reader.

Nita: When I read I don't read as fast as I'm supposed to I guess but at a sixth-grade level.

Interviewer: Can you explain that?

Nita: I can't read out loud, I don't know why but I can't read out loud, but I can read in my head.

Nita's concerns were true for other students in these classes. The Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey indicated that 14 of the 25 students completing the survey were concerned with reading out loud. Three of the 14 students described their oral reading as "poor," and 11 students felt they were just "okay." In analyzing other questions from the Kelley and Decker (2009) survey related to reading as easy or difficult, 12 of those 14 students who were concerned with oral reading said they struggled as readers. These students claimed that reading was "very hard" for them. The pressure of reading orally for struggling readers seemed to be a common concern even though it was not a routine practice in these classes. These data suggested that students who struggle as readers may have been subjected to round robin reading practices in

previous years. In reviewing the video data, I found only one instance of students reading orally, and this reading was set-up in an interesting way. First, Ms. Gables asked if anyone would like to read one paragraph. Students volunteered for a specific paragraph. Ms. Gables then asked the students to practice reading their paragraph silently before the class started reading. I also noticed that teachers stood in close proximity to the reader and softly pronounced words when necessary. In these classes, students read with table groups, with a partner, silently, or the teacher read the text. Support may mean the difference between positive and negative connections with reading during these contexts. It seems that the continued practice of reading with a partner or in small groups might help reduce some of the social stress for struggling readers.

Yes, reading preferences matter! Molly and Nita became more animated as they discussed personal reading. Both students were quick to respond with book titles and explain why they liked each book. While Molly's frustration seemed consistent regardless of the text, but she spoke passionately about Joan Lowery Nixon's (2012) novel *Nobody's There*. Molly described her feelings about reading as "excellent" on October 30 because the book she was reading was the right book for her. Her interest as a reader seemed directly related to what she was reading. In the following excerpt she described these feelings:

Um, I really liked *Nobody's There*. I really liked reading that book. It always tucked me in a little bit closer when something was happening. There was one part where the older lady she . . . she, . . . kinda like passed out and was in the hospital the next day. She couldn't remember what happened and there was this girl named Abby and she was her sitter and she went to the hospital.

Molly's connection with this book seemed linked to the fact that it "tucked me (her) in a little bit closer when something was happening." Based on the interview data, I believe that Molly meant the book made her feel connected with the main character and her struggles. Sadly, this was one of the only positive experiences Molly described as a reader. Nita reported enjoying "vampire books and comedies." She did "not like nonfiction." Nita described her reading strictly through her personal preference for fiction such as the *Twilight Saga* (S. Meyers, 2005-2011). The significance of finding the right book seemed paramount for all readers but may be particularly so for those readers who struggle to connect (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Lapp & Fisher, 2009).

Overall, the data revealed that students described their reading in terms of improvement. Even when students perceived themselves to be struggling readers, the students in these classes believed they were improving. The tickets out the door echoed the comments about students' concern with their status as readers and their improvement as readers. Interestingly, the focal students interviewed for these classes were fairly consistent in how they described reading and how it impacted their lives even when reading was not considered a preferred activity. What students liked to read, how they liked to read, the importance of reading, their purpose for reading, and how these practices and preferences worked together at times and against one another at other times shaped and reshaped students' identities as readers. These identities could be described as being in the moment and could depend on other factors such as the how the student felt about the assignment. While the focal students were used as the nexus for analysis, the students completing the two reading surveys and the tickets out the door provided

evidence that labeling students by reading identities is not possible. Students may love reading in one context depending on how they define reading success, the context of the reading, and their reading preference. Students' identities as readers clustered around these three identities, but for each student their identities were nuanced by time and context.

Collectively, students from these classes generally expressed reading as a pleasurable experience. As the evidence shows, students are in a state of constant change. What they like to read, how often they read, and how they read is subject to change, but it seemed that reading instruction in these classes was working to promote students' identities as readers.

Case One: Ms. Gables and the IRA (2000) Qualities

How do teachers support these shifting and emerging identities in students' reading? According to Ms. Gables recognizing the moment students begin to see themselves as readers is fundamental to the creation of a reading environment designed to nurture and support these complex identities. She describes this moment as:

They get really hungry for books. They latch onto a series or an author. They want to tell somebody about it. They know what they like and don't like. They have preferences. They can recommend a book to somebody. They think they're good at it. They receive recognition from another students like, "Oh, my gosh, you read a lot of books." or "Didn't you just get that book last week and now you're finished?" They can tell they've gotten to another level.

Ms. Gables had been at Lakeside for seven years at the time of the study. During this time, she taught sixth-grade Language Arts. According to Ms. Gables, she was often assigned students with learning disabilities and students with low end-of-grade reading

scores. Ms. Gables found working with students assigned to her classes both challenging and gratifying. At Lakeside, Ms. Gables had worked with the same exceptional children's teacher, Ms. S. Ms. Gables attributed two factors to her success as a teacher. First, her long standing relationship with Ms. S., and the school's somewhat progressive thinking in terms of planning was reportedly pivotal to her success as a teacher. Ms. Gables felt as though planning as a grade level and then adapting grade level plans to fit the needs of her students, was critical to her students' success as readers. Additionally, Ms. Gables described the vertical team planning that occurred monthly with sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teachers as important for her professional growth as an educator.

Using the IRA's (2000) position regarding the critical knowledge and practices that *excellent* reading teachers should possess, I looked for ways a specific teacher might work within the time constraints of today's curriculum demands and the current testing climate created by high stakes testing to espouse these critical qualities. The data sources used to build a more complete picture of how Ms. Gable's instructional decisions supported her students' identities as readers included: 20 videotaped class sessions, field notes from the 20 videotaped sessions (see Appendix A), a teacher interview (see Appendix B), and student interviews (see Appendix E) with six focal students. These data sought to answer a central question for this research project: In what ways do the participant teachers adopt, adapt, or resist reading practices that have been identified as positive in helping students develop as readers work in support of the emerging reading identities of these students?

This analysis began with how the participant teachers worked within the confines of a school that has been identified as a high needs school due the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Using the IRA standards (2000), the data sources were analyzed for how the IRA standards (2000) were implemented within Ms. Gables's classes. The adoption of these standards, how these standards may have been adapted, or the resistance of specific practices will be examined for the teacher's purpose in creating a positive literacy and learning environment that nurtures students' identities as readers.

Ms. Gables set high expectations for students' achievement and worked to meet these IRA goals:

1. Excellent reading teachers understand reading and writing development and all children can learn to read and write.
2. Excellent reading teachers continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.
3. Excellent reading teachers know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program
4. Excellent reading teachers use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
5. Excellent reading teachers offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read
6. Excellent reading teachers are good reading "coaches" (that is, they provide help strategically).

Following this analysis, evidence will be presented that reveals additional and significant evidence of teaching qualities beyond the IRA recommendations (2000). Understanding how students' reading identities are being supported within these classes will require an examination of how these teachers enact the IRA's (2000) view of reading instruction, and an examination of how each teacher brings a unique viewpoint to their instructional decision making that determines what they emphasizes as teachers, and how they view these instructional decisions in the context of their students' reading development.

1. Teachers Understand the Development of Reading and Writing and Believe That All Children Can Learn to Read and Write

According to Ms. Gables, "I don't know how you make a difference in another person's life if you don't have a relationship with them. I think that's something you come back to again and again. I have to have a working relationship." These working relationships were evident in the videotaped observations that revealed active strategies designed to construct meaning from print, a deliberate building of background knowledge before reading, opportunities for building vocabulary, and opportunities for students to read with fluency. During the teacher interview, Ms. Gables made clear that her instructional decisions were made for the students in each class. Understanding who the students were and what they needed as learners seemed critical for Ms. Gables. In the following excerpt, she briefly described the two classes included in this study:

Core 1 is our low inclusion group. Those students scored one and two on their EOGs (End of grade test) last year. In fact, it's mostly 1s. There are 30 students in that class and either 20-21 students have IEPs (Individualized Education Plan). There are several students in there who are ESL [English as a Second Language]. It is a high needs group, for sure. We had 31, but now we're at 30. One student went back to Mexico, but he'll be back in January. Two-thirds are boys, very

active boys. That's the make-up of that group, a variety of ethnicities and races, across both classes. A very diverse group.

Core 2 is a group of 29 – it's my smallest class. They're just a regular language arts class. Most passed EOG first time last year, the rest on second take. They are all AL [Academically Gifted Learners] in math, but nobody is AL in reading. Math is their strength. They're actually the most balanced class with male/female ratio. Overall 60% of my students are male. When I look at my group that did not pass their EOGs, 60% are male . . . consistently.

Ms. Gables's basic understanding of her students, the students' learning needs, and her role in helping these students achieve success informed her instructional decision-making. For example, Ms. Gables planned for reading activities in which students worked with a partner or in a small group rather than dominating class time with whole class discussions and readings. When asked about planning for students' needs, Ms. Gables responded, "Sometimes it's independent and sometimes it's whole group, it depends on what the need is for that day."

Core two was described as more experienced as readers and instruction was adapted in a much different manner. According to Ms. Gables, students were developing in a different way in core two and therefore require different learning experiences to encourage their identities as readers. She explained this in the following way:

That's intentional because they're just more experienced as readers, they're more mature and proficient and so we're able to go faster or to let them experience it on the front end and save discussion for the back end rather than doing so much ground work. They can tackle it on their own, even if they struggle with it, and not shut down. It's not too much of a struggle to where they become frustrated.

Videotaped evidence and the teacher interview confirmed the use of sequential instruction in which reading and writing complimented one another in the development of

learners within these classes. For example, students wrote in response to their independent reading on a regular basis. Ms. Gables described the assignment as important to improving students' reading during several of the videotaped classes. Students also described these writing assignments as important to their reading. During her interview, Ms. Gables explained her reasoning for this assignment as one that helps students think about their reading and connect with the story.

Ms. Gables adjusted her instructional planning and the implementation of instruction to provide the best opportunities so all children could learn. For example, Ms. Gables explained the use of frontloading with core one as a means of providing essential background knowledge for the reading or writing activity. Ms. Gables understood that without this background knowledge students would not be able to access the readings or written assignments in ways that would sustain success. In core two, Ms. Gables understood that students were ready to take on more challenging reading assignments without giving up. She described this as letting "them [students] experience it on the front end and save discussion for the back end." This understanding that students would read and come to conclusions about the text before the group discussion would then encourage more lively discussions. These teachers seemed to understand the development of reading and writing and believed that all children could learn to read and write.

2. Teachers Use Ongoing Assessments of Individual Student's Progress to Relate Instruction to Previous Experiences

Ms. Gables used assessments that seemed purpose driven. Videotaped evidence of 20 classes revealed that some assessments remained consistent while others were dependent on the unit of instruction but were always in response to the students in the

class. For example, each week a vocabulary practice quiz was given the day before the test to provide students with the opportunity to see what they need to study. Both summative and formative assessments were used with the intent to help students make connections to previous experiences. For example, student read about the qualities of great leaders in a unit entitled “Perspectives and Viewpoints.” This unit included nonfiction texts, fiction texts, poetry, and primary documents. Rosa Parks, John F. Kennedy, Jr., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Things That Haven’t Been Done Before” (Guest), and pictures of the Greensboro Sit-In were used to build students’ understanding for the engaging scenario (the summative activity for the unit). In groups, students wrote a picture book designed to teach younger children about good leadership qualities.

Other assessments such as those requiring students to construct a short answer response to a particular reading passage align with the Common Core Standards (CCS). Students were provided with multiple opportunities to master this type of assessment. Ms. Gables explained the importance of repeated experiences in relationship to her students’ success as readers in the following way:

One thing we do is we practice and practice and practice knowing they are going to become better readers if they practice. They’ve got to have practice with different texts, with different words, with writing. The more time on tasks that we have the more practice they get, the better they will become as readers. I think it’s important to maximize those experiences and it makes them more meaningful, not wasting time on stuff that’s not valuable or doesn’t make a difference.

These data do not suggest a “drill and kill” assessment format. Rather the routine nature of some assessments such as vocabulary quizzes, short answer responses, and reading log responses seemed to balance other assessments such as the creation of a picture book or

writing about important Civil Rights Leaders. This combination of assessments seemed to guide the instruction for students in both classes.

3. Teachers Know and Use a Variety of Ways to Teach Reading Effectively

The evidence for teaching reading in a variety of ways was evident in both classes, but there was overwhelming evidence from core one. According to Ms. Gables, a large number of students in this class had IEP's (20-21) and several students were ESL students. The range of reading levels in this class presented a challenge. In addition to the building of background knowledge for reading texts, Ms. Gables described the activities and pacing of these activities in terms of the needs of the students in the class.

Students in core one, for example, used graphic organizers to identify the character traits of two famous leaders. Students were required to use quotes from the text in support of the identified trait initially with Ms. Gable's support and then with their reading group. Ms. Gable's decision to use a reproducible graphic organizer with a limited number of character traits allowed students to manage the reading assignment in a successful manner. In contrast, core two used textual from a novel that demonstrated character traits for a famous leader. Again, Ms. Gable's guided the selected of quotes from the first chapters of the book, but gradually released this decision making to the students. During one of the class observations, I heard two students discuss which quote would best demonstrate the character trait they had identified. During these reading assignments, students read with a partner or independently depending on the students' preference, so students had the support of their classmates in making these decisions.

After the reading assignments, students shared some of their quotes as a class providing a check for thinking.

Ms. Gable's not only possessed a teaching toolkit that was filled with an extensive knowledge about the many ways to approach the teaching of specific reading goals; she also knew which students would benefit from each approach.

4. Teachers Offer a Variety of Materials and Texts for Reading

Using a variety of materials and texts for reading in these classes seemed dependent on the students' needs. In the following excerpt from Ms. Gables's interview transcript, she explained her decisions to use specific texts with her students:

Interviewer: I want you to talk a little bit about how you decided to use *Three Cups of Tea* (Mortenson & Oliver-Relin, 2007) versus what was on the recommended list and how you came up with using Roberto Clemente and Albert Einstein and that video clip of the Ted Talk.

Ms. Gables: We looked at the power standards and they were all about reading nonfiction texts and then comparing and contrasting different versions of those texts or different sources of information; what did you gain from the different experiences. So we looked at the texts and we found out topically there was a leadership theme. They wanted us to use the *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1998) theme and two chapters from *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 2001) and we could not do that . . . chop up the books we loved. We also knew we needed to spend time on nonfiction, so we decided to teach those standards using different texts. For first period, I did not want to get into a novel because I worried about the [students'] endurance [for] of it, and I know they do better with quicker accomplishments, the chunking, whereas the second period had more endurance and stamina for the book. For the Roberto Clemente and Albert Einstein biographies, that was text that we already had. There was one day during content [planning] we pulled all the books we had and searched for something that was nonfiction dealing with leadership and that we could also find some sort of video clip or something like that where they would have to consider a different source of information. So that was kind of the criteria we were using.

Ms. Gables voiced a clear purpose for selecting specific texts and materials for use with each class. This purpose and intent combined with an overall goal for helping students become better readers resonated throughout the data sources as well as meeting the expectations of the curriculum. The selection of texts appropriate to students' proficiencies provided variety that supported the reading identities of the students in these classes.

5. Teachers Use Flexible Grouping to Tailor Instruction

Flexible grouping was evident to some degree in both classes although not as consistently in core two. Ms. P., the school's reading specialist, asked Ms. Gables for an opportunity to work with her core one class. Ms. Gables described the outcome in the following excerpt from the teacher interview:

Interviewer: Can you talk about Ms. P. and her role in that class?

Ms. Gables: She was teaching an eighth grade reading class and for the past few years has not seen nearly the amount of growth there as with the younger kids. Her idea was that she wanted to double down on sixth grade and use more of a co-teaching. She couldn't teach another elective course because they were in the core classes at that time. She came and asked if I was interested. I had a class of 30 students so I said absolutely.

Ms. Gables, Ms. P., and Ms. S., the EC teacher, discussed the needs of the students and decided to utilize Ms. P.'s expertise in two ways. First, Ms. P. took a small group of students out of the room during vocabulary instruction. These students worked on the same vocabulary, but they received specialized instruction to learn the vocabulary.

According to Ms. Gables, the group was formed after the first few vocabulary quizzes.

Ms. P.'s group started out with five students. The group then added two different students

and removed one student who no longer needed the extra support. After vocabulary practice ended, Ms. P.'s group rejoined the class. Ms. P. worked with small groups or individuals during the remainder of the class.

According to videotaped evidence and field notes, students frequently worked with partners or in small groups in both classes. The evidence suggested that these groupings are guided by Ms. Gables's desire for students to engage as readers and learners in the class. The use of flexible groupings for vocabulary is one way Ms. Gables demonstrated an understanding that whole class instruction can be a costly type of instruction as it allows students to be passive learners or completely disengaged. This coupled with the fact that students in Ms. P.'s vocabulary group were essentially failing before this flexible grouping decision was implemented confirmed the importance of flexible grouping for the students in this class. Students' success as readers seems to be the foundation for grouping decisions in these classes.

6. Teachers Provide “Coaching” as Reading Instructors

As a reading “coach,” Ms. Gables used reading logs, daily reading, and a variety of reading activities and texts as a means of engaging student. She described this support in the following way:

Interviewer: How do you support your students in their literacy development?

Ms. Gables: Lots of ways. I think it is important to communicate with them and have good relationships with them. They need to feel like they can approach me and get an answer, they can talk to me and ask questions, that I am interested in them as learners and readers. They need to know I'm there. I think feedback is important. They not only need to know they got an A and they did a good job, but what's good about or what do you need to work on. I think that can be really formative.

This example demonstrated the criterion Ms. Gables described as important to helping her students become better readers and thus helped to shape students' identities as readers. These data demonstrated that promoting an environment in which the teacher becomes a participant who "coaches" through an orderly, organized classroom shows that reading is important and is valued in this class.

Ms. Gables's Instructional Decisions in Relation to Her Students' Reading Development

Based on the classroom observations, I noticed several patterns emerge that were not directly tied to the IRA qualities. First, the class structure suggested that Ms. Gables was guided by an intentionality based on her dispositions about teaching and learning. Second, Ms. Gables used examples of how students should think about their learning to improve literacy. Third, there seemed to be a clear connection between student assessment and classroom instruction. Finally, Ms. Gables started using independent reading during week two of the classroom observations. From this time on, independent reading was fairly consistent throughout the class sessions (see Table 4).

Table 4. Unique Characteristics of Teachers in This Study

1.	The structure of the class and the time spent on specific activities helped guide students' learning.
2.	Helping students make "a plan" for learning.
3.	The connection between student assessment and classroom instruction that provides a unique view about why this teacher teaches and re-teaches.
4.	Time for independent reading.

Each of these patterns was addressed in the teacher interview with Ms. Gables to better understand how these instructional decisions came to be, and how and why she believed they were important. While some of the patterns are addressed in the International Reading Association's (2000) Excellent Teaching Qualities, others become equally interesting in better understanding how Ms. Gables's instructional decisions may support students' reading identities and their learning outcomes.

1. The Structure of the Class and the Time Spent on Specific Activities Helped Guide Students' Learning

One of the obvious patterns observed in Ms. Gables's class is how the classes are organized in terms of what is expected of students both behaviorally and academically. When asked during the interview to describe a typical class, Ms. Gables responded with following:

On an ideal day I want them to have some time to read independently. I think it's important that they do that when I'm with them, not only for accountability but so they will know it's something I value, that it's something that it is important and we spend time doing it because it's something good to do. I also think it is important that they experience personal choice in their reading. So much of what they do in school is dictated to them and I think if they are going to be motivated as a reader on their own it's got to be something they enjoy and they associate those feelings with that. I like to spend time doing that at the beginning of class. I like to spend time working on vocabulary and working with words. I think some sort of word study is important. So much of what they're able to understand is based on how many words they know, do they know multiple meanings of words and how they're used differently and the parts of speech that give a clue to what they mean. The last 30-40 minutes of class becomes like a whole group reading instructional time or writing. That's probably what the biggest chunk of time is for. Sometimes it's independent and sometimes its whole group, it depends on what the need is for that day. It's a time where they get repetitive practice with different kinds of texts and different strategies while I'm with them and can support them.

Ms. Gables's understanding of how her classes should be organized and why demonstrated an understanding beyond the IRA's (2000) description of engagement, motivation, and high expectations for students. Ms. Gables understood that her students needed to make choices about independent reading materials and her students needed time to invest themselves in these books, which is one of the principles of adolescent literacy (Sturtevant et al., 2006). Additionally, Ms. Gables's emphasis on vocabulary and vocabulary development seemed to be consistent with that of the IRA's (2000) description of vocabulary development, yet upon further analysis I determined that it was unique to her view of how her instructional decisions would help her students. First, Ms. Gables devoted between 15-20 minutes daily for traditional vocabulary instruction. This may seem like a substantial amount of time to spend on vocabulary instruction, but Ms. Gables believed the number of words students knew and how well they knew these words would be a predictor for success as a reader. I would argue that Ms. Gables's reasoning for vocabulary instruction was one of the attributes that cannot be explained with only the IRA's (2000) position in that she had specific, logical, and substantiated reasons for how this classroom time was spent.

Class structure and reading activities adapted to student needs. Based on the data analyzed for this study, I determined that Ms. Gables's classes met the IRA (2000) criteria yet how she discussed her views about classroom structure seemed unique in its' emphasis as a context for her students' reading development. First, based on videotaped observations and field note evidence, students in core one came into class at least 15 minutes before class started. When asked about this, Ms. Gables said that because buses

arrived at different intervals students were previously held in the gym or commons for 15-30 minutes before school. This practice seemed to generate behavioral issues so the decision was made to send the students to their homeroom (first core). Ms. Gables's students came into the classroom quietly and began the process of setting up for the school day. This beginning time seemed to help students get their day off to a positive start by encouraging students to organize for the day and begin reading. Students wrote down their homework in their agendas, and in first core Ms. Gables consistently initialed students' agendas and checked homework. Generally, homework was the same every day: students read, completed the reading log, and studied for the weekly vocabulary test.

Ms. Gables encouraged students to organize and read during this time period and most students used this time for those purposes. More importantly, Ms. Gables repeatedly talked with students about how their daily reading improved their personal reading fluency and comprehension. This consistent routine provided students with a pattern of predictability. Ms. Gables talked about the importance of students understanding her expectations as a way for students to be successful. This seemed to be Ms. Gables's first step in helping students use metacognition as learners. Students understood the routine of the class and this predictability allowed students to make decisions about how they could be successful in this class.

Ms. Gables varied the ways in which students engaged in reading, writing, and vocabulary activities. For example, students might read a section of a text with a partner and complete a graphic organizer, noting the character traits, or study vocabulary words with a partner by quizzing one another. This variety seemed to be nestled within an

overall structured environment. Students seemed aware of the expectations and were generally engaged in the learning activities. Ms. Gables continually monitored the room and was quick to provide support when necessary. This environment seemed business-like in nature with Ms. Gables serving as the president of the company. Ms. Gables raised her hand and students stop talking. While classroom management was important, the environment of these classes was about more than mere classroom management. It was more like “we are here for a reason—to become better readers and writers—and I am here to help you achieve this goal.” Again, this structured environment built a foundation for students to predict what was expected in terms of both academic performance and personal monitoring of their behavior.

Data collected for this study included two units of instruction based on the Common Core Standards (CCS). The second unit in particular was adapted to fit the students’ needs in terms of the texts selected and the focus on nonfiction as a genre. Core two read *Three Cups of Tea*, the autobiographical account of Greg Mortenson’s dream to build schools in underdeveloped countries. Core one read two biographies, Albert Einstein and Roberto Clemente, none of these texts were on the County’s suggested list for the unit. Ms. Gables met the needs of her students by adapting the texts to fit their needs. Her instructional decisions created an environment that seemed to be a space where students were expected to learn because of these carefully designed units. It was apparent from the first observation that student movement and behavioral expectations were firmly set. Students moved only to get tissue, sharpen a pencil, or get a book. It appeared these expectations were established early in the year, as there was no discussion

about student movement during the ten weeks the researchers collected data. In observing the classroom environment, students seemed to be aware that Ms. Gables had high expectations that were purpose driven.

Ms. Gables discussed how this structured environment provided predictability that was important to her:

Interviewer: I noticed that often you give kids an overview of what's going to happen that day. Can you tell me a little about that?

Ms. Gables: I started doing that because in my research class last year with Angela Fields. She would always put that up first on her power point. As a learner, I liked knowing where we were going and that helped me anticipate what was next. It would take away my fears about what was expected of me and nothing would catch me by surprise and it also gave me confidence in her that she was well planned and it helped set the tone so that's something that I committed to doing. I started at the end of last year, but it was intermittent. I think it helps structure wise. When I am in a class or professional development, I like to know what activity is coming next. It helps me relax.

Ms. Gables assumed that if this was true for her, it might also help her students. In reviewing the video data, it was evident that students were able to predict the order of the class from their past experiences, and the agenda that was always listed on the board. The field notes confirmed that classroom patterns seemed to help students move from one activity to the next without confusion.

2. Helping Students Make “A Plan” for Learning

The structure of the class also seemed important to setting the stage for students to become metacognitive learners. The first step in this process seemed to be letting the students know where the instruction was headed by reviewing the agenda. It then continued throughout her daily instruction as Ms. Gables talked with the students about

their learning. For example, at the end of an independent reading segment, Ms. Gables asked students to log-in their pages. Ms. Gables encouraged students to organize their thinking by posing a series of questions about independent reading. Ms. Gables asked students about tracking their reading rate, noting when they finished reading a book, and paying attention to how often they were reading.

Another example of “making a plan” was designed to help students write a children’s book about leadership. After completing the unit “What is leadership?” Ms. Gables read the children’s book *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 1978) and asked students to listen for examples of leadership. Afterwards, the class discussed the leadership traits of the Little Engine, and completed a story map for the book. Then, Ms. Gables told students they would work with a partner or in some cases a small group to design their own children’s book that would focus on leadership. In preparation for their book, students were required to complete a graphic organizer as a plan for their book. This story map graphic organizer was then “fleshed out” as each page was planned on a story-board template. Students were encouraged to map out each page before beginning the book. Some students used the computer to create their book while others generated a handwritten book. According to Ms. Gables, this activity spanned a week and the results were very good. She reported that students worked together to negotiate topics, characters, conflicts, design issues, and in the process taught an audience about leadership.

Ms. Gables’s instructional decisions seemed to emphasize how she could help her students devise “plans” that would allow the student to take ownership in learning. These

two examples of metacognitive thinking were combined with the careful structuring of the class and encouraged students to think about how they learn and to take ownership of their learning by making plans for it. They were repeated in small steps each class every day that promoted students' ownership in learning occurred during.

3. Student Assessment and Classroom Instruction Explains Why This Teacher Teaches and Re-teaches

A clear connection could be made from the classroom instruction to the students' assessments in these classes. Ms. Gables's instructional decisions seemed to be driven by students' learning. The data collected through assessments such as reading comprehension quizzes, reading journals, unit post assessments, and the first reading benchmark were discussed at length in class with students. For example, students took a reading comprehension quiz on Albert Einstein on October 16. The question asked students to choose two leadership qualities that best represented Albert Einstein and support their answer with textual evidence. The students had not been successful responding to this question even though students had access to a completed graphic organizer drawn from the text and the class discussion. After reading the responses, Ms. Gables reported that students were able to choose one quality but did not understand how to provide textual evidence. Furthermore, the use of textual evidence was missing or sparse.

On October 30 to prepare for the quiz on the Roberto Clemente biography, Ms. Gables spent 30 minutes discussing and modeling acceptable ways to include evidence from text. She reminded students that they had struggled with this type of question so they would talk about ways to answer the question about Roberto Clemente's leadership.

Then, Ms. Gables modeled a response, which focused on a sixth-grade teacher so the students all knew this teacher. She deliberately told students that the answer gave two character traits that were supported with evidence from the text. Then, she checked off the criteria set by the question. Next, Ms. Gables asked students to select two character traits from their graphic organizer that they thought applied to the Roberto Clemente. Finally, Ms. Gables asked students to go back into the text and find a third example to support their thinking. These were shared with a partner at their table group. This step-by-step instruction highlighted the value Ms. Gables placed on the use of assessment data to guide her teaching. The time Ms. Gables spent modeling this constructed response demonstrated an understanding of the complexity of this type question and the need for explicit teaching.

During the teacher interview, Ms. Gables was asked to talk about the amount of time spent modeling the “how to” of essay questions:

Ms. Gables: Yes, the essay question on Einstein came before Clemente. The question was, “Which character traits do you think best describes either Einstein or Clemente? Defend your answer.” They [Students] had to choose from among a bunch of character traits we had used. Which did they find the most evidence for? That first try they chose four traits and then they would say he was a good inventor and then died in 1937. So we had to back up and a lot more coaching went into it the second time because we realized they didn’t know how to approach this type of question.

Interviewer: How did they perform the second time?

Ms. Gables: Way better. They had a format. The other thing we did was we gave them a sample paragraph. They had to go through it [the paragraph] and put a star next to the trait they were going to focus on, and then place stars next to the three pieces of evidence on their character analysis grid they planned to use, and then they had to get that approved, and then they could write. So there were a lot more checks in there.

Ms. Gables explained that students needed to learn how to answer this type of question to be successful as readers and students in the future. In this instance, Ms. Gables's reasoning addresses the teaching and re-teaching described by the IRA (2000), but it also offered a view of the role careful planning and assessment plays in how she meets the needs of these specific students. To Ms. Gables, answering this type of question was more about connecting learning across time and for students to be successful readers. Furthermore, being able to answer this type of question allowed students to build knowledge by making a claim and supporting that claim with evidence as proof, which Ms. Gables described as important for accomplished readers. This example of re-teaching speaks to how this teachers honors particular skills and reading goals. For Ms. Gables, connecting important skills and goals began with what she believed was important as an accomplished reading teacher.

On October 4, Ms. Gables discussed the post assessment from the first CCS unit. This County did not provide directives on administering these assessments, but the expectation seemed to be that they were to be administered as an assessment not a teaching tool. According to Ms. Gables, students spent one frustrated class session working on the post assessment. The next day she asked students how they felt about the assessment. Students responded with "nervous," "sad," "scared," "bored," and "don't want to do it." Ms. Gables told the students that she understood their feelings, and assured the students that they would get through this together and that she was asking the students to "not give up on me." Ms. Gables used the assessment as a teaching opportunity rather than an assessment. She went over testing tips that could be used with

nonfiction (biographies), then read the complex text for the students, and then modeled how to answer specific parts of the multi-step question. In this way, Ms. Gables appropriated and re-purposed an assessment to help her students learn.

During our interview, Ms. Gables explained that students had worked on this assessment for one class period but the text complexity and the multi-stepped questions had made the test a lesson in frustration for core one. Her decision arose from wanting students to gain something productive from the assessment. More importantly, it seemed that students felt reassured by Ms. Gables's steps to help them with an assignment that was overwhelming.

4. Time for Independent Reading

CCS has shifted the focus of instruction from fiction to nonfiction and from more discreet skill mastery to broader understandings about texts that span all media. In response, Ms. Gables changed her requirements and expectations of students in terms of independent reading from the beginning of the year. During one of our early conversations, Ms. Gables mentioned that she felt as though the CCS was so demanding that she had no time for independent reading. The first observation did not include independent reading, but beginning with week two classes started with 10 minutes allotted for it. During this self-selected reading times, most students (but not all) read. I noticed a change in the number of students who were focused and seemed engaged through the progression of observations in both classes. Ms. Gables explained her decision:

I also think it is important that they experience personal choice in their reading. So much of what they do in school is dictated to them and I think if they are going to be motivated as a reader on their own it's got to be something they enjoy and they associate those feelings with that. I like to spend time doing that at the beginning of class.

The interviews with students from both classes echoed the value Ms. Gables placed on this activity. Students repeatedly referred to independent reading as a time to read what they like and as one of the most important parts of class. Interestingly, when asked about the reading activities in their classrooms, students talked passionately about the novels they were reading during independent reading time rather than specific reading activities they engaged in during other parts of lessons. This reading time not only addressed the IRA's (2000) critical qualities for excellent reading teachers in that reading a variety of texts in flexible instructional settings is a product of this reading time. It seemed that Ms. Gables's view of why this time was so important for her students was unique to her perspective of students needing time to become motivated as readers and is consistent with the *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy: A Framework for Instruction and Policy* (Sturtevant et al., 2006). Ms. Gables's decision seemed to demonstrate a respect for her students' need to make choices for what they read and to provide time for students to become motivated to read.

Teaching Practices in Support of Students' Identities as Readers

The students interviewed for this study, the students participating in the reading interest surveys, and the students completing the tickets out the door combined with the videotaped class sessions and the field notes confirmed that students in these classes generally felt they were improving as readers. Students claimed more success as readers

this year and pointed to an increase in vocabulary as one indicator for their success. Additionally, students described how independent reading and the accompanying reading log worked together to help build their reading skills and their interest as readers. Students named texts read during these videotaped observations as interesting and important to their reading development. Finally, students described projects such as the children's book project as meaningful and engaging. Educators know that engagement is necessary for learning to occur (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; S. Miller, 2003; Pitcher et al., 2010). In these classes, students were provided with opportunities that were engaging and provided a clear purpose for their participation with explicit learning goals.

When asked what Ms. Gables felt her primary goal was a teacher, she responded, "I want them to learn. I want them to be better when they walk out my door in June than when they walked in. I want them to be a better writer. I want them to be a better reader." In most ways, Ms. Gables's instructional decisions meet the lofty goals set by the IRA's (2000) critical qualities for reading teacher. Yet, how Mrs. Gables's instructional decisions determined what she emphasized with students and how these decisions unfolded in the context of each class were the fundamental building blocks in creating these highly engaging and purposeful learning environments. First, the deliberate structures and the organization of her classes provided a predictable environment for students, underscored her high expectations, and encouraged students to be planful in their own learning. By understanding the structure and organization of the class, students could begin to think about what was expected by a particular activity. The ways in which Ms. Gables designed reading and writing activities that addressed the needs of her

students placed students' learning as her priority even when it meant going beyond the perimeters set by her school district. Second, while assessment was used as a means of designing instruction, it seemed as though its over-arching goal was to help students build knowledge that could be used for future learning. Third, Ms. Gables made it clear that reading was "work" for most students, and that making a plan was a good way to achieve these "work" goals. Ms. Finally, Ms. Gables provided time for students to read. Considering the fact that every minute of every class period is precious for teachers like Ms. Gables, the importance of honoring self-selected reading is monumental. Students in these classes knew that reading was valuable and worthy of their class time.

Ms. Gables's personal views about what was important for her students work with the IRA qualities and supported students' identities as readers who were always "getting better. Her instructional decisions also influenced students' identities as readers. Consider Donna's feelings after reading about Rosa Parks, "Well, as I thought of it [the text], I read over it again and I was thinking in my head maybe I could change the world just like she did." Donna's connection with the text suggested that her sense of herself as a reader who could change the world on that particular day occurred at least in part as a response to the Ms. Gables's instructional decisions. Students in these classes frequently referred to their reading in terms of improvement whether they loved reading or not. Students associated their positive feelings about reading with increased vocabulary, increased reading fluency, or understanding what they were reading better. On November 27, a ticket out the door simply stated, "I feel connected because I was reading and understood what my partners were talking about." Ms. Gables has meshed the qualities of the IRA

(2000) with her own proclivities to build an atmosphere where students' sense of themselves as readers was consistently supported.

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY TWO: TWO SEVENTH-GRADE CLASSES WHERE STUDENTS CLAIM “I’M A GOOD READER, AND I ENJOY IT.”

This chapter will present two diverse seventh-grade classes taught by Mr. Wallace. Data from these classes will comprise the case, and the data analysis will explain how the teacher’s instructional decisions worked to support the reading identities of the students in both classes. As with Ms. Gables, this case will also be presented in three sections. First, the students interviewed for this study will be used to build a first-person narrative explaining how students in these classes viewed reading, reading instruction, and their identities as readers. Second, the teacher’s reading instruction will be analyzed in relation to the IRA’s (2000) six critical qualities of excellent reading teachers. Finally, the classroom instruction and teacher’s instructional decisions will be analyzed to better understand those classroom phenomenon not explained by the IRA’s (2000) critical qualities.

There were a total of 61 students in the two 7th-grade language arts classes taught by Mr. Wallace. These classes represent the diversity of the school with 18 African American, 4 Hispanic, 6 Asian, and 34 white. There were 35 males and 26 females. Thirty-four students completed the two reading surveys (see Appendix C and D) designed to gauge students’ perspectives on reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Kelley & Decker, 2009). Classes were videotaped and researchers collected field notes during the ten observations. Additionally, students completed a ticket out the door for six of the class

sessions. These tickets asked students to describe themselves as readers either by selecting an adjective, circling a picture, or drawing a picture to represent how they felt as a reader at the end of that class period. Seven students were interviewed from these classes; three students from core one and four students from core two. The voices of the seven students interviewed from these classes will be used to describe students' perspective on the classrooms. Analysis of these voices will be supplemented by the tickets out the door (330 total), reading surveys (68 total), and field notes (20 classes total) from the other class members.

The student interview protocol (see Appendix E) was used during each interview. In addition to these questions, students were asked about their reading surveys, classroom observations, and their tickets out the door. These data were examined by focusing on the patterns and trends arising from the data sources. Students in these classes described reading, and more specifically good reading, articulately using their personal preferences and experiences. There were distinct categories for these descriptions. Students who were good readers in these classes were described as: students who loved to read, students who were comfortable as readers, students who understood what they read, and students who connected reading beyond the text. In these classes, trends regarding how students positioned themselves as readers began to appear. Specifically, three clusters emerged from the data sources: I am a good reader (Ty, Mary, Sue, and Larry); I am a focused reader and strive to find ways to improve (Derrick and Abhriham); and I like to read, but I'm not very good at it (Able).

Within these clusters, students demonstrated fluidity depending on the structure of the class, perceptions of good reading within the context of the class, and in terms of each student's personal reading preferences. Students took up identities that shifted sometimes in small ways and sometimes in more dramatic ways, which seemed to occur in relationship to their personal perspectives on reading. The number of students in these classes who articulated a "love" for reading became the most significant trend among the data.

Seventh-grade Students See Good Readers As . . .

According to the seven students interviewed for this study, good readers in these classes seemed to share some common qualities. These commonalities were supported by data collected from the 68 reading surveys completed by students returning the Kelley and Decker (2009) *Motivation to Read Survey* and the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reading interest surveys. Additionally, the tickets out the door (330) completed by students at the end of five sessions served as a rich data source for building a more complete understanding of how students perceived good readers and how they positioned themselves as readers within these conceptions of "good readers."

"Good Readers Love to Read."

Sue and Derrick described good readers as students who love to read. Derrick saw reading as more than understanding the words on a page. To students defining good readers in this way, reading was an experience that created pleasure. Derrick described good readers in this way: "being a good reader means you also like reading a book and don't get distracted when they are reading." He added that "You don't have to know all

of the big words, but at least some words that are specific like integrity, disciple, and things like that that help you understand what you're reading.”

Sue described this passion for reading in the following:

I think to be a good reader you have to enjoy it. It has to be something you want to do. Being a good reader is not just understanding the words, it's more like following what's going on and having an image in your head and wanting to find out what's happening and being excited about reading. It's really not about the level you read at, it's about what you want to get out of reading, how it makes you feel.

Sue was an avid reader who often spent her free time reading. According to Sue, her love for reading offered knowledge about a variety of topics.

The videotaped observations of these classes indicated that an environment was created where students were provided quiet time that was free of distractions for independent reading, and that when students read in groups, independently, or as a whole class, they were engaged in the reading activities. The Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey asked students how often they read a book. The response choices included: never, not very often, sometimes, and often. Of the 34 students who completed this survey, 19 reportedly read often, eight sometimes, and only one student responded not very often. Additionally, the Kelly and Decker (2009) survey asked students how they perceived themselves as readers. The response choices included: an excellent reader, a good reader, an okay reader, or a poor reader. Sixteen of the 34 students described themselves as excellent readers, 15 students answered “good,” and only one student described self as an “okay” reader. These survey results suggest that a large number of the students in these classes read often and love reading.

“Good Readers are Comfortable.”

Abhriham described good readers as being comfortable “with the reading level you are at and you understand what you read and you are really comfortable reading.” When asked to clarify, Abhriham explained this in terms of being able to read at your grade level. He commented, “If you are in fifth grade and you can read at the fifth grade level then I wouldn’t say you would need to be able to read at a sixth or seventh grade level.” Abhriham felt that being “comfortable” as a reader was connected to putting forth “your best effort.” According to Abhriham:

Often time when you are reading something that is uninteresting to you, you won’t put your best effort forward, but if you try to understand the passage and the questions to your best ability you are being a good reader.

Data collected from three dates (October 23, October 30, and November 27) indicate that 34 students selected “comfortable” as the adjective that best described how they felt as readers. These tickets out the door include important insight into what Abhriham describes as “comfortable.” Four students described this comfort as readers in the following way:

Student 1: Because I’m not the fastest reader and sometimes have to read the text more than once, but I’m still a good reader

Student 2: I like where I’m at as a reader.

Student 3: I am a comfortable reader because I like to read and I know I can understand what I read.

Student 4: I am comfortable at my reading level and I feel comfortable when I read

Students in these classes believed that being comfortable meant reading at a pace that allowed them to understand the text and was suited to the purpose of the text.

Additionally, these students recognized that comfort in reading could mean that re-reading for understanding was a hallmark for a good reader.

“Good Readers Understand What They Read.”

Ty, Derrick, and Larry described good readers as readers who understood what they read. To these students, reading comprehension was the cornerstone of good reading. For Ty, reading comprehension was more basic, but still important to his view of what it meant to be a good reader. He explained that to be a good reader one must “know what you are reading and to like if you are asked questions you are able to answer them without stumbling.” Derrick described comprehension in a similar way, “Well, you don’t have to read that good but you have to be able to understand it [the text] with the commas and the grammar and punctuation. I think that means you are a good reader. And I think understanding the reading is important.” Larry felt that comprehension meant, “being able to understand what you are reading.” To each of these students the importance of understanding the text was central to being a good reader.

Students completing the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey were asked about comprehension in the following way: “When my teacher asks me a question about something I have read, I _____.” Student response choices included: “can’t think of an answer, have trouble thinking of an answer, sometimes think of an answer, or always think of an answer.” Of the 34 students completing the survey, 23 students responded by saying they could always think of an answer, eight replied they

could sometimes think of an answer, and only one student indicated having trouble thinking of an answer. The student interview data and the Kelley and Decker (2009) results revealed that students in these classes attributed positive feelings to their reading and comprehension of the texts read. The student interviews call attention to the importance of “understanding” what is read while the student survey results confirm that students in these classes feel that they are able to comprehend what they read, and hence think of themselves as good readers.

“Good Readers Make Connections.”

Mary described good readers as readers who make connections to the text they are reading and beyond. When asked to talk about the good readers in her class this is how Mary responded:

I still remember things from the readings and can apply those to real-life situations. And like when I read something later in the year I can relate it back to that. In other words I can connect new information to old information. I think Sue is a good reader. She is an avid reader she reads quite a lot and she reads again bigger books, more complicated stories, and these books are good for her and she can also connect books. We have talked about books before and she’s talked about how several books are similar to each other and she can apply those books and what she’s learned from those books to other things in class.

For Mary, reading meant connecting across genres and across disciplines. Mary was not alone in her belief that reading should be connected to other texts. On October 23, October 30, and November 23, eight students selected “connected.” In these classes, “connected” could refer to self-selected reading or to class activities. Four students were selected to demonstrate how being “connected” may influence students’ identities with reading.

Student 1: I chose connected because I like to feel like I'm actually in that book.

Student 2: Because every book I read has passion and instantly hooks its readers

Student 3: I feel connected because I understand what I'm reading and I like to put myself in that situation

Student 4: Because I was reading and understood what my partners were talking about

A sufficient number of students described feeling connected as important features of good readers. Feelings like being in the book and being hooked seemed to help students experience the novels they read. By such connectedness students seemed to position themselves as “good readers.”

Reading Identities: This is Who We Are . . .

As students described what good reading meant to them personally, these data cluster around the previously described themes: students who loved to read, students who understood what they were reading, students who understood the role of reading in their current and future success, and students who could read fluently. Within these clusters, the specific ways in which students situated themselves as readers emerged as an important component of the data. Three clusters appeared from the analysis of data sources regarding how students situated themselves as readers. These clusters included students who saw themselves as: (a) good readers and enjoyed reading, (b) focused readers looking for ways to improve, and (c) students who liked to read but did not feel very confident. Students did not voice these identities in all cases but often enough to suggest these identities were consistent across time.

These analyses will examine the three clusters of reading identities by focusing on how students describe these identities, how the classroom practices and reading context might have influenced these reading identities, and the role of students' reading preferences.

“I’m a Good Reader, and I Enjoy Reading.”

Four students, Mary, Sue, Ty, and Larry, positioned themselves as good readers who enjoyed reading. Each of the students spoke with differing degrees of passion about reading, but all felt like they were good readers. First, Larry recognized himself as a good reader, but he described willingness to read outside the classroom as dependent on the book. According to Larry, “It depends on what the books about, I like action and adventure types books.” Larry felt that as a good reader he understood what he read but was not a particularly fast reader. Ty commented: “Well, I like to read Harry Potter and books about magic, and I don’t think of reading as a punishment but as something someone would like to do.” During the student interview, Ty shyly added his name to the list of good readers in his class. Ty’s reserved personality seemed to make naming himself as a “good” reader difficult; however, Mr. Wallace described Ty as one of the best readers on his team. Ty talked the importance of good reading comprehension skills, which he possessed, and added that he did not “like being forced to read.” Ty did not view the reading requirements of this class as “being forced.” Implicit in Ty’s comment was the choice of reading material, if the choice was his reading was not a punishment.

Mary’s position as a good reader seemed to reflect both confidence and passion. Mary explained that she spent a good portion of her time reading. She spent “like hours

and hours, and I like to read lots of different genres of books.” Mary attributed the time spent reading, the genres read, and her rate of reading as important to her as a good reader. Throughout the interview, Mary spoke with enthusiasm about various books she had read and how these books impacted her life. For Mary, books were an essential part of her life, as they provided more than information—they provided companionship.

Sue also spoke self-assuredly about her position as a good reader. According to Sue, “I’m a very strong reader. I participate in Battle of the Books so I do a lot of reading for that. I read a lot for fun on the weekends and at night. I enjoy reading and I read at a high level.” Sue explained that she loved fiction books. “Nonfiction is a tough genre for me just because most of the time it’s not interesting, but sometimes I come across a non-fiction book I enjoy,” Sue noted. Although she found nonfiction “tough,” Sue raised the possibility that readers could “love” reading but not be equally comfortable in all genres. For her, nonfiction did not seem to pose an issue of comprehension but rather one of interest.

Data from the Kelley and Decker (2009) survey revealed that a significant number of students in these classes shared positive dispositions toward reading. Two questions provided data about how students claimed reading identities that could be described as positive. First, students were asked to complete the following statement, “I am _____.” Answer choices included: “an excellent reader, a good reader, an okay reader, or a poor reader.” Sixteen of the 34 student respondents described their reading as excellent, 15 selected good as a descriptor, and 1 student selected okay. Second, students were asked to respond to a statement about the ease or difficult of reading. The statement

was simply, “reading is ____.” Students were asked to select from “very hard for me, kind of difficult for me, kind of easy for me, or very easy for me.” Twenty-eight students described reading as very easy and another five selected kind of easy.

The data suggested that a large number of students from these classes positioned themselves as good readers who enjoyed reading. The passion with which students described their reading varied, but the self-confidence reported by the students in this class was overwhelmingly positive.

The context of reading and students’ reading identities. Many students described the context of their class as important to their identities as readers. Whether these students could directly attribute the context of a specific class to their positive reading identities, students described how they read and what they read as important. The students interviewed for this study consistently noted the positive impact of several reading assignments in Mr. Wallace’s class. One reading assignment students described as important was an online reading from the *New York Times*. During this assignment, students worked with a partner to read debatable topics from this online source. Students read a host posting, and then any position postings made by other readers. The step connecting these reading assignments to students’ personal lives came when students were asked to write a position about a topic of personal interest. Mary said, “We recently read something from the *Times* online and we read a lot of articles from the debate room and we had to pick a topic from the list and write our own side of the argument . . . and I just finished writing an essay on patriotism last night.”

Students seemed to agree with the positive description Mary provided for this activity. Two of the remaining six focal students completing a ticket out the door that day confirmed Mary's view of this activity on October 23, "I know about the issue of 'doping' from an article on Lance Armstrong and hearing about various basketball/football related issues." One student talked about how the *New York Times* website provided him with information that could be related to other issues of interest. A second student gave additional confirmation about the contextual connection and personal satisfaction gained from this reading activity, "The *New York Times* was worded harder but from my experience I was quickly able to figure it out." Student comments such as this suggested that students were able to use previous learning, whether it was school learning or learning that occurred outside the school setting, to construct new knowledge and feel successful as readers. In this context, they enjoyed reading, suggesting consistency with those students who find reading a satisfying activity.

Independent reading was also an important element of the context supporting students' love of reading, even if they did not always consider themselves in this way. All of the students interviewed for this study shared similar sentiments about independent reading time. Students described the consistency of the independent reading time that was a staple for students in these classes as important for their reading. Sue explained that independent reading time was "nice like when you come in the class we usually just read for 10 minutes on our own. That's nice because we can read something that you truly want to read and then it will get your mind set to Language Arts." Students repeatedly

described this self-selected reading time as pleasurable and important because they were allowed to choose what they read.

The tickets out the door seemed to confirm the importance of this self-selected reading time as students expressed positive feelings, often referring to the novels read during this section of class. On November 13, 2012, students were asked to draw a picture of how they felt as readers today and explain these drawings. Sixty-eight percent of the students indicated they felt happy as readers and 29% of the students felt okay as readers. Generally, students referred to these feelings in terms of independent reading. For example, “I have learned how to enjoy reading! It’s really fun especially if you understand the book!” or “Once I actually started reading it’s starting to become more fun. I really enjoy reading now.”

Data from these classes suggested that the context of the class does impact their identities as readers. It would be premature to make claims from these data beyond those reported in this section, but the reading context did seem to be important to these students.

Yes, reading preferences matter! Students who are engaged in the process of any learning activity increase their potential for learning (Graham & Weiner, 1996). Specifically, students who are immersed in reading are more likely to remain a captivated reader if allowed to make personal choices (Pitcher et al., 2010; Rosenblatt, 1982). Students from these classes repeatedly echoed the findings of the previous literature regarding students’ engagement in reading and the ways personal choices positioned themselves as readers. Mary and other students from these classes felt strongly about

their reading preferences. Mary talked about how her connection to characters allowed her to understand events and situations vicariously. She explained in the following:

Yes, I find things more interesting when they relate to me. Like I can think, yeah, I've felt that way before or it's an experience I gone through personally then I can relate and I can get more into the story I feel. But I also feel like it's important to read books that don't correlate to my life because then you learn about new things that you could apply to your life and you can experience it without experiencing it.

Sue described her life as “pretty ordinary” and that reading about something adventurous was more interesting. Students positioning themselves as good readers who enjoyed reading were specific in what they preferred to read.

Students completing the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reading interest survey noted fiction as the genre most often read. Three students positioned themselves as readers with respect to fictional texts in the following ways:

Student 1: I love to read but only Blueford High books (Alirez, Blackwell, Kern, Langan, & Schraff, 2008)!

Student 2: these are the warcraft books (Knaak, 2001) I am ready and have to read (772 pages, 700 pages)

Student 3: I choose this picutre because I like reading the books I choose the *Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), *Power of 6* (Lore, 2011), *Son of Neptune* (Riordan, 2011), and *Chicharito* (Worrall, 2012).

Students consistently reported a preference for fiction across reading clusters. How student preferences might have impacted students' sense of themselves in these classes, and particularly those students who positioned themselves as good readers, seemed to center around student choice in reading. Students engaged in the process of reading want

to connect with the text and learn more about life through the experiences of others, and these students reported their reading as important and meaningful.

“I’m a Focused Reader and I’m Looking for Ways to Improve.”

Derrick and Abhriham characterized their reading as focused and improving. For these students, reading’s primary purpose was improvement acquired through their focus on the texts being read. Several students described the importance of connecting to what they read. For example, Derrick said, “Well, I am a very focused reader and controlled reader. I like to be connected with the words in the reading. If there is many quotes in the reading I like to write down the quotes to help me.” Feeling in control of personal and class reading seemed important for students who positioned themselves as focused and improving readers. A student completing a ticket out the door said, for example, “When I read, I slowly take in what I read and imagine it in my head. I comprehend everything before moving on.” One of the central tenants from these descriptions focused on how students claimed ownership of their reading improvement. In this sense, students sought deliberately to improve their reading through their focus on their reading processes.

For these students, improvement was the central focus as their identities as readers, and while students felt it was important to connect with the text, the student interview data revealed that students in this group did not feel the characters and situations from these texts must always mirror their lives. In fact, most of the students wanted to identify with some aspect of the novel or reading. Students described Greg from *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kenney, 2007-2012) as easy to connect with because it was written from a younger perspective and in diary form. Series were repeatedly

described as helpful for students in reading because students seemed to connect with characters like Greg from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kenney, 2007-2012) and Percy Jackson from *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005). These series provided students with opportunities to follow their favorite characters through exploits that were sometimes unbelievable and sometimes believable events. It seemed to be how the students connected with the main characters that made series reading an important type of reading for these students. Multiple students positioned their reading as focused on a series of novels or some aspect of a novel they connected to personally. Thirty-nine of the 46 students completing tickets out the door on November 20 described reading in terms of being focused and improving as readers. The following tickets were selected to demonstrate how students positioned themselves as readers at the end of the class:

Student 1: I feel like this (☺) because I enjoy to read and it's a good way to work the brain.

Student 2: I know it's getting easier for me to read. So that's why I have a light bulb.

Student 3: Because I practice reading to myself everyday so I could get better at it and I think I am now and excellent reader and on the reading level I should be

Students seemed optimistic about their ability to improve their reading through focus and a connection with the text read. This optimistic view was prevalent in both classes.

The context of reading and students' reading identities. The students interviewed from Mr. Wallace's class described the starters (creative writing and second quarter grammar instruction), the class discussions, vocabulary development, and projects such as the debatable topics as important to their reading. Both Derrick and Abhriham

characterized writing as a way to improve reading. For example, Derrick described the relationship between reading, writing, grammar, and presentation skills:

Well, grammar helps you understand the sentence more and helps you read it better, or it can help you with your presentation skills . . . like it you helps you pause with the commas or stop at the periods. So, it helps you like catch your breath. And the exclamation marks let you show the emotion that you are feeling.

According to the video evidence, both Derrick and Abhriham volunteered to share their writing often and consistently demonstrated a high level of engagement. Whether the assignment was creative writing or grammar, Derrick and Abhriham seemed to believe that these practices could improve both their writing and reading.

Students worked for ten minutes each day on either the grammar or the creative writing starters so the consistency of this practice provided students with an opportunity to improve (Sturtevant et al., 2006). When students participated in the creative writing prompts, they read over their work if they finished, but more often than not, it appeared that students were still writing when the ten minutes ended. Abhriham summed up his feelings about creative writing as starter, “I do love writing and it’s just this year I’ve gotten to show my love for it.” Abhriham and Derrick seemed to understand the strong connection between reading and writing as a symbiotic relationship (Campbell, 2007; IRA, 2000; Fairbanks, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1982).

In examining the videotaped evidence of the grammar instruction, I found that a more traditional style of instruction was implemented. A commercial textbook was used to present the skill, the class discussed several examples, and then students completed the remaining examples independently. Following the completion of the exercise, Mr.

Wallace called on students to provide the answer for each example. Also evident in these data was how Mr. Wallace talked with students about the importance of grammar.

Several times Mr. Wallace explained that the CCS included grammar, and that grammar would help students both as readers and writers. In some way, both Derrick and Abhriham came to believe in the potential that grammar could provide them as writers and as readers.

Derrick and Abhriham also relied on class discussions to help improve their reading. The class discussions were more traditional in nature; Mr. Wallace generally asked the question and students responded. However, how students responded to the previous comments made by their classmates substantiated the potential for these discussions to improve students' reading by understanding the views of others (Moje, 2002; Sturtevant et al., 2006). Several students described these discussions as helpful to them as readers. Abhriham talked about hearing from his classmates and then "checking" his thinking to theirs. He explained how class discussions were an opportunity "to see others people's opinions and tell me if I'm looking at something the right way or the wrong way."

Student data from the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey added to the voices of the students interviewed. Twenty-three of the 34 students completing this survey indicated that reading out loud with a group and/or class discussions were helpful to their reading. Blanton et al. (2007) described the use of teacher directed lectures or discussions as a non-transformative instructional tool, but these students described the discussions in their

classes as helpful. It is important to note that class discussions were just one of the ways in which students participated in reading and writing.

Several students voiced concern with improving their vocabulary and talked about how this could benefit their reading. Abhriham explained his reading in terms of his vocabulary knowledge. According to Abhriham, vocabulary is essential:

Well, I think that I am on grade level like if I'm reading a seventh grade reader then I'm a pretty good reader, but when you start getting into high school you can always get better and I always try to strive to improve and expand my vocabulary so I can understand what I'm reading.

Data from the tickets out the door support the interview data about vocabulary. Students who drew picture or selected pictures indicating happy readers often explained this happiness in ways similar to this student: "Because I am a great reader. I read without difficulty and I understand strange words using context clues."

Every student interviewed described the debatable topics as important to their reading, but Derrick and Ahbriham described the personal meanings they ascribed to this assignment. Derrick was appalled by the use of SAT scores as the determining factor for high school students playing college basketball. Derrick reported loving sports and in particular basketball. He explained that his paper was about "basketball and the rule that you have to score a 700 on the SAT, and my paper talked about one player who didn't make it, and he became homeless and committed suicide because he wasn't able to fulfill his dream." Derrick felt this rule was terribly unfair and allowed too much emphasis to be placed on SAT scores.

Abhriham's topic was, "Do drone attacks do more good than harm?" He determined from researching the topic that drone attacks are too risky because of the potential harm for innocent bystanders. Abhriham spoke with passion about the topic and explained how researching the topic and then writing about his view helped him to think more critically during class debates. Abhriham described this critical thinking process in the following way:

You have to choose which ones to win and which one to back away from 'cause often people go back and forth trying to get in the last word and it doesn't work that way. If they are constantly making good points on you and you try to retaliate then you should change the subject, and that's some of the mistakes I see people made that I've learned from.

Both Derrick and Abhriham viewed the potential of the classroom contexts as ways to improve their reading. The ways in which these students took ownership of their reading improvement using these contexts as a means to improve was transformative for both students (Blanton et al., 2007).

Yes, reading preferences matter! Seven students were interviewed from Mr. Wallace's team and only one student, Derrick, described nonfiction as their preference in terms of reading texts. In the following interview excerpt he described his view of nonfiction:

I: Can you think of any biographies that you have enjoyed this year?

D: Yes, *Charles Barkley Basketball Great* (Macnow, 1998). It was about his life and how he grew up and what he was like growing up. Umm, it inspired me because he never gave up on his dream of becoming a basketball player. When he was young, he tried out for several teams and didn't make it, but he didn't give up. They said he was too small or not fast up. But he didn't give up.

Derrick seemed to find natural connections with nonfiction as he described other books with similar appeal.

Abhriham reported, “I like to read mysteries, some science fiction, and some action books and that’s about it.” Yet, when asked if he liked nonfiction as a follow-up question, Abhriham explained, “It depends on what it is.” Abhriham was reading a biography of Muhammad Ali (W. Meyers, 2001), and he really enjoyed finding out more about Ali.

According to the data analyzed from the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey, most students reported a preference for fiction. Only 12 of 34 students indicated an interest in informational or nonfiction reading. One student read the newspaper, and ten students noted an interest in reading information from on-line sources such as magazines or websites.

These data suggested that while more students prefer fiction to nonfiction it is the students’ preferences that mattered to them. They described with passion books that fit their personal preferences.

“Actually, I Like to Read, But I Am Not Very Good.”

Able was the only student interviewed who described reading as pleasurable, yet he did not believe he was very good at it. Other data sources confirmed that a small cluster of students from these classes might have enjoyed reading but lacked confidence in their reading skills. Able explained his reading in the following:

Well, I like to read a lot but I’m not very good at it. The book I’m reading right now is *The Roar* (Clayton, 2009) and I’m about to read *The Whisperer* (Clayton, 2012) soon. I like to read and my teacher helps me understand a lot usually. We

do a lot in class to help us understand reading like we are studying grammar so that we know why apostrophe and commas are where they are. I'm okay at it.

Able drew a happy looking face on one of his tickets out the door. When asked about this ticket he replied, "I was reading the Alex Rider Series (Horowitz, 2000-2006). I'm finally reading for fun and not just for a grade."

Data analyzed from the 34 students completing the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey found several indicators that other students may feel similar to Able. Eleven of the 34 students reported that reading was an "okay way to spend time." When asked how often students read outside class, two students reported "almost never." Five students described reading as "kind of easy for me" in contrast to 29 students who viewed reading as "very easy for me." These survey data suggested that not all students viewed reading as easy and might not choose this activity without it being required to by a teacher.

While these data may be viewed with caution as the number of students positioning themselves within this category is very small, they suggest that some students may like reading and yet feel trepidation with regards to their position as readers in the classroom. Those students who reported pleasure in reading but felt less capable seemed to be enacting shifting identities as readers similar Able's sense of emerging proficiency. They are also students who educators need to better understand. How these students view reading is essential so that instruction can be aligned in ways that may support their learning and increase their confidence as readers.

The context of reading and students' reading identities. Data from the student interviews revealed that students wanted to connect with the texts they read. Able described choice as important to his reading, but he cautioned that when teachers do choose the texts they should know what their students like to read. For example, Able felt the texts included in the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam readings were depressing. Other students reported that texts selected for this unit only provided the “pro” Civil Rights point of view. Although this student agreed with the “pro” view, she thought all point of views should be read.

One of the independent reading activities Mr. Wallace required was “anchoring assignments” each quarter. Students described these assignments as a requirement in which they selected two fiction and two nonfiction books and completed questions about the book. The questions included basic questions about the book’s content and extended to questions about theme or recommending the book to other students. Interviews indicated that students’ reading preferences seemed to influence how these assignments were viewed. The anchoring activities were not listed as favorite reading activities, but Able described the activities as important in the following way:

Interviewer: And what do you think about these (anchoring assignments)?

Able: They’re boring.

Interviewer: Do you see any benefit in these reports?

Able: Yeah, you learn more about the book and he can tell if you’ve read the book. The only ones that are hard for me is the non-fiction ones.

Interviewer: Why do you think those are harder?

Able: Because I can't imagine them and it's not what I want it to be; it's what it is.

Able described the amount of time he spent reading by choice as minimal. He also felt that his ability to choose the book was central to how much time he was willing to invest in reading. It was finding a series that he connected with that he described as pivotal to his change as a reader. Able described his reading as "getting better." It seemed important to Able that he had established a plan for what he would be reading next, "Yep, I have four books stacked up in my locker." These data suggested that Able attributed his newfound interest in reading not to the instruction of the classroom but to finding the right books.

Yes, reading preferences matter! Able talked about his love for the Alex Rider Series (Horowitz, 2000-2006). Able loved this series because of his travels:

Well, I've been to a lot of places. I lived in Syria and I've been to every continent except for Australia. So, I like how he travels around and goes to all those places, and they are about mysteries. I like how the books show how Alex feels when he is in those places. I like that.

While Able positioned himself as someone who does not read well, he spoke passionately about the Alex Rider Series (Horowitz, 2000-2006). For Able, it was important for him to visualize the places described in the series. Interestingly, Able spoke about the book as if it were a movie. The power of connecting with some aspect of the novel whether it was the characters, their conflicts, or the setting was evident in how Able described his feelings about this series, "I can see the places he is talking about like when he was at a

bull fighting and I knew exactly what he was talking about because I went to a bull fight. So, I could like see it like it was in the movie.”

Students who liked reading but believed they were not great readers described reading in terms of their preferences. Able felt that finding books like the Alex Rider Series (Horowitz, 2000-2006) allowed him to connect with his travels. Other students described the importance of choice as essential. During one classroom observation, the following books were being read by students: *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kenney, 2007-2012), *Twilight* (S. Meyers, 2005-2011), *The Mark of Athena* (Riordan, 2012), *Alabama Moon* (Key, 2006), and *The Holy Bible* (King James Version). In addition to these titles, several students were reading graphic novels (titles were not visible to researchers), and one student was reading *Chronicle of War* (Wilkinson, 2009).

In the Words of Seventh-grade Students, What Do Teachers Need to Know About Reading Instruction That Students Consider Meaningful?

Students interviewed for this study consistently offered advice for reading instruction that is meaningful in terms of relevant texts that are interesting, reading these texts with others, and participating in assignments that are active and engaging. Several students wanted teachers to know that providing an environment was also important for these activities to occur. Able was succinct in describing what teachers need to know about reading instruction, “Stop choosing boring books! Kids like to read interesting books.” When asked the follow up question, “How can I talk to teachers about choosing interesting books?” Able articulated his thoughts about how to help:

I think teachers are trying, but they need to talk to the kids in the class. Look at your kids and ask them what they are interested in. See what kids are reading.

Look at their books when you walk by. If kids are reading *Diary of Wimpy Kids* (Kenney, 2007-2012) or Alex Rider Series (Horowitz, 2000-2006) choose books like that don't choose Shakespeare. Kids don't like to read that stuff—no books like that. Don't pick just chapter books; choose some picture books and some magazine articles. It's good to throw some sports books in too. I have done all of my nonfiction books on sports books. Go to the library and ask the librarian to tell you about the most popular books kids are reading right now and then ask what would be close to that book. That would be helpful. Librarians are very good with that kind of stuff.

Abhriham agreed with Able about talking with students, but not merely from an interest aspect; he felt teachers needed to understand how students feel about the complexity of the text. Abhriham explained that, "If it makes them feel like they are struggling and if it is helping them and try to help them understand what the material is really about."

Students voiced interest in reading out loud or in groups as a way to make reading meaningful. The results of the Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey indicated that 15 of the 34 students surveyed had read something interesting in class with a small group or as a class and found this enjoyable. Analysis of the Kelley and Decker (2009) survey administered to the same 34 students revealed that over 38% of students felt like good readers when they read out loud and 10% felt like very good readers when reading out loud. Nine percent of the students surveyed felt okay, and another 9% of the students described themselves as poor readers.

Able synthesized the students' sentiments:

I think teachers need to know that students love to have an interesting way to read. Like reading out loud, or reading in groups, or researching and then presenting it. In my way of seeing things, students like that kind of thing.

Finally, Mary indicated that at least some students care about their teacher's feedback. She described how she viewed grades and feedback from assignments in the following:

Well, this year I really haven't got a lot of grades back. And so I just get my interim and I see I got a 94 on this article so when I'm writing future articles I don't really know why I made a 94 so I don't know how to do better the next time. I want to improve, but I don't know what I got off to make a 94. . . . And like sometimes teachers will write little comments about how you can improve on your work and I like getting feedback and I haven't gotten much of that. Um, not just give grades but make sure kids understand why they're getting the grade they're getting.

To hear the voices of a diverse group of students, and to understand what matters to them in terms of their reading provides teachers with the rare opportunity to design instructional opportunities that will support students' sense of themselves as capable readers. It is not often that students offer advice about what they like to read, how they like to read, and the role of teachers' feedback. These valuable insights could yield opportunities that provide students with the literacy that really matters.

Mr. Wallace: The Coach

I tell a lot of stories about how I grew up with nothing and I had a lot of teachers who, because I didn't have anything and because of where I was going to school, they assumed I couldn't make it. They didn't push me. I used that feeling to go in the opposite direction. I used that feeling to work harder and push myself. I think it's that constant, even when they're struggling, to let them know they're doing a good job. I'm proud of you, to get them feeling positive about themselves.

According to the data sources, this excerpt seemed to capture Mr. Wallace's sense of responsibility to his students. As each data source was analyzed, Mr. Wallace's sense of self was apparent in how he designed instruction and interacted with his students.

Mr. Wallace's position as a former coach and Athletic Director provided him with an opportunity to connect with students in a personal way, but it was the evidence from the classroom that earned him the nickname "coach." Students described Mr. Wallace as someone "helps me understand a lot" and a teacher who designed instruction in "the best way." Yet, the ways in which Mr. Wallace "coached" the students in this study reached well beyond the basketball court and classroom into adult life.

The International Reading Association's Position Regarding Critical Qualities for Excellent Reading Teachers

Teachers like Mr. Wallace and Ms. Gables do share the qualities of many other good teachers. They have a strong command of content knowledge, and they use this content knowledge to motivate their students. Students in these classes were engaged in the reading and writing activities of the classroom in part because of the classroom management. Both teachers set high expectations for students' achievement and work to help all students meet these IRA goals (2000):

1. Excellent reading teachers understand reading and writing development and all children can learn to read and write.
2. Excellent reading teachers continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.

3. Excellent reading teachers know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program
4. Excellent reading teachers use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
5. Excellent reading teachers offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read
6. Excellent reading teachers are good reading “coaches” (that is, they provide help strategically).

According to the IRA (2000), teachers who are excellent reading teachers share these qualities as well as the research-based descriptions that distinguish excellent reading teachers. This research examined the following qualities in two seventh-grade classes taught by Mr. Wallace who has been identified as an excellent reading teacher by his principal, his students’ end-of-grade reading test scores, and data from the pilot study for this dissertation.

Mr. Wallace, Teacher and Coach

During any given videotaped session, students in these classes seemed eager to participate and students’ engagement in class activities was robust. These data seemed consistent with the way Mr. Wallace explained literacy learning in his classroom. During the teacher interview, he explained this concept in the following way: “. . . but I want it to be in a safe environment. I want them to try to take chances on what they’re doing and read something a little higher level.”

Mr. Wallace had taught at Lakeside for 16 years. During this time, he taught seventh grade exclusively. The year of the study, Mr. Wallace taught both language arts and social studies. He had also been the middle school basketball coach for 10 years and was serving as the Athletic Director as well. He attended most of the sporting events because he felt that it was important for the coaches and students to know that he supported their efforts.

Mr. Wallace was selected for this for a number of reasons. First, I worked with Mr. Wallace during his first years at Lakeside. It was obvious from my interactions with Mr. Wallace that his commitment to students went beyond the confines of the typical classroom setting. Mr. Wallace was in the pilot study for “Literacy That Matters” providing data that informed this study. Finally, Mr. Wallace agreed to participate in this study with the full understanding that a significant commitment would be required in terms of the observations, providing information about the focal students, and helping coordinate the student and teacher interviews.

Mr. Wallace worked with a variety of students at Lakeside but more often than not, he was assigned classes with students who had challenges in learning and with behavior. This year Mr. Wallace taught on a two-teacher team, so he taught language arts and social studies for 61 students. According to Mr. Wallace, students were grouped in seventh grade by their sixth-grade math end-of-grade test scores, so in terms of math the students were overall strong, but in reading several students failed the sixth grade end-of-grade reading test, passed the test on a retest, or scored a low level three on the test. There were 18 males and 13 females in Mr. Wallace’s core one. This class was ethnically

and socially diverse and included: 13 African American students, 12 White students, 4 Latino(a) students, and 3 Asian students.

Core two students were considered academically gifted, so most of the students in this class had been identified by the State as eligible for service in the Academically Intellectually Gifted program. In this school, these students were grouped with clusters of other AIG students for both language arts and math classes. There were 17 males and 13 females in this class. Again, the students in this class were from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds and included 22 White students, 5 African American students, 2 Asian students, and 1 Latino student.

Using the IRA's (2000) position regarding the critical knowledge and practices that *excellent* reading teachers should possess, I looked for ways a specific teacher might work within the time constraints of today's curriculum demands and the current testing climate created by high stakes testing. The data sources used to build a more complete picture of how this teacher made instructional decisions that supported her students' identities as readers included: 20 videotaped class sessions, field notes from the 20 videotaped sessions (see Appendix A), a teacher interview (see Appendix F), and student interviews (see Appendix E) with six focal students. These data seek to answer a central question for this research project: In what ways do the participant teachers adopt, adapt, or resist reading practices that have been identified as positive in helping students' literacy and learning development in support of students' identities as readers?

1. Teachers Understand the Development of Reading and Writing and Believe That All Children Can Learn to Read and Write

Mr. Wallace's constant and consistent belief in his students' ability to succeed was evident throughout the data sources even when students struggled with reading or writing. Comments such as "Good job transitioning, guys" and "I'm proud of you" seemed to instill a positive self of self in his students. During the teacher interview, Mr. Wallace described the differences between the two classes in the following:

Mr. Wallace: Second class is more motivated. They have question after question. They don't trust themselves. They want constant feedback . . . is this right, am I in the right direction. In the first block there were so many kids that weren't successful last year because of lack of effort. We're trying to get them to show more effort. Even in their daily output; their output is minimum. They give as much as they can do. They want to give you only what they have to get done. Second block, I have to stop them after multiple pages. They want to go on and on.

Based on the videotaped evidence and the field note analysis, both cores one and two seemed to be taught similarly even though Mr. Wallace described core one as less motivated and less likely to go beyond the minimum. Generally, each class started with a 10-minute independent reading time, 10 minutes of creative writing time, 8 minutes sharing time, and 30-40 minutes of reading instruction or some type of reading activity.

Mr. Wallace's description of the students in cores one and two note differences in terms of previous testing data and motivation, but the ways in which he challenged these classes suggested a belief that both classes could achieve. The videotaped evidence seemed to confirm this expectation that students in both classes were capable given the time and the instructional support they needed.

While the “anchoring” book reports seemed basic, Mr. Wallace commented during the teacher interview that the purpose of the reports was to encourage students to make personal goals, monitor their progress, and share their thoughts about their reading. Mr. Wallace reminded students of the due date for the “anchor assignments” often and commented that some students emailed their work for him to review. He encouraged this type of going beyond the minimum. Mr. Wallace reminded students of due dates so that they could self-monitor their progress.

The data sources included in this study demonstrated evidence in support of Mr. Wallace’s understanding of his students’ reading and writing development. Further, Mr. Wallace not only told his students that they could learn to read and write, but he designed instruction that would make this possible.

2. Teachers Use Ongoing Assessments of Individual Students’ Progress to Relate Instruction to Previous Experiences

Evidence from the videotapes, the field notes, and the teacher interview confirmed the use of ongoing assessments that related instruction to students’ previous experiences. For example, Mr. Wallace described the use of debatable topics that were relevant to student’s lives as a tool for instruction. Students prepared for the debate in teams with Mr. Wallace’s guidance and feedback. He described the use of *The New York Times* website selected for this instruction and the outcome in this interview excerpt:

That website gives 80 debatable topics so you try to give them time to find one that spoke to them, but some of them didn’t do that, some of them would just find one. Second block their presentations were great. I was shocked.

Mr. Wallace recognized that students needed time to find a topic that “spoke to them” even though some students chose not to do so. Understanding this challenge, Mr. Wallace provided multiple opportunities for students to find a topic relevant to them because it was important to their understanding of argumentation.

Mr. Wallace continually monitored students during group work. Talking with students during group work seemed to follow a similar format. First, Mr. Wallace listened to the conversation, and then redirected or added guidance. As students worked independently, he individualized feedback that was purposeful and seemed helpful to the students.

The use of formal and informal assessments, such as benchmarks and unit assessments, were used to inform and design instruction in these classes that related to students’ previous experiences.

3. Teachers Know and Use a Variety of Ways to Teach Reading Effectively

The largest segment of time for each class was devoted to reading instruction or reading activities related to specific instruction. The first unit of instruction focused on “Viewpoints and perspectives.” The unit included a short biography and poetry about Rosa Parks written by Rita Dove (2000), who was a child on the bus when Rosa Parks was arrested; poetry about the Civil Rights Movement; Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream Speech”; primary sources from the Greensboro Sit-In; the screenplay of “Driving Miss Daisy” (Uhry, 1988); and the movie version of *Driving Miss Daisy*. Throughout the observations Mr. Wallace’s comments suggested that one goal for this unit was to make connections across texts. “What does this tell us about Daisy?” or

“What is the significance of this event?” or “How does this connect with other sources?” During the student interviews, students reported enjoying the class reading of “Driving Miss Daisy” (Uhry, 1988) because they were encouraged to use expression and dialect when they read. A variety of instructional methods were provided through an array of related texts and genres with the end goal of student engagement.

The next unit focused on persuasive and argumentative text and writing. Students read about a number of topics that were relevant for middle school students. Using the mobile computer lab, or their personal electronic devices, students visited a website about debatable topics and selected topics to read about. Using this information, students wrote persuasive letters to the editor of the newspaper about the topic they found most interesting. A graphic organizer guided this process. Mr. Wallace discussed the editorial section of a newspaper with students and explained how people were allowed to express their opinions in this section of the paper. Using editorials provided students the opportunity to engage with text and allowed them to build their own arguments.

The student debates provided other opportunities to read and discuss a variety of texts. Students used two topics for class debates. However, the topic every student remembered was the debate on SMOD (Standard Mode of Dress). Mr. Wallace told the students that if the team opposing SMOD made a convincing argument against the dress code that the dress code would be suspended the following day. Students prepared for the debate and completed three rounds. Mr. Wallace told students the challenge was to present statistics and evidence to support their claims. The pro SMOD team won the debate. While the class debate was the culminating activity for the unit, the blogs

provided a foundation for students to learn about reading critically and sharing their opinions about a particular topic with others. These blogs also offered students a forum where they heard their classmate's opinions about the same topics and about their personal blogs.

Mr. Wallace's decisions to use a variety of ways to teach reading was evident in the videotaped sessions as students followed a daily routine but were exposed to a variety of instructional activities.

4. Teachers Offer a Variety of Materials and Texts for Reading

When asked to describe the typical class, Mr. Wallace described it in the following excerpt:

Structured, organized. I kind of always map out every minute of the class. It becomes habit for them. When they come in they know what they're going to do. . . . [One day,] they were pulling out starter sheets before I could tell them we're not going to get to it. I try every day in class to have them read something, to write something, and I want them to be able to verbalize something with either me, the class, or together. If I can get them to do that every day, then I'm happy.

During the student interview, students were asked what they enjoyed most about reading in their class, students consistently responded that the room was quiet and that it was just a relaxing place to read. Larry said that just reading without taking notes was really relaxing. The variety of texts read during these units included both online texts and print texts. Students engaged in readings from *The New York Times* online site, photocopied articles, drama, and a video clip of an interview with Rosa Parks. These texts seemed to be selected with student engagement in mind.

5. Teachers Use Flexible Grouping to Tailor Instruction

Students in these classes often worked independently. There were also opportunities for group reading and discussions. During several of the videotaped sessions, Mr. Wallace had students working with their table group to discuss a reading, brainstorm a topic, or defend their thinking about a particular topic. Overall, a high degree of on task discussion occurred during these sessions, and students reported enjoyment in hearing the opinions of their classmates. Students worked with a partner to complete research assignments. These opportunities were observed during at least two videotaped sessions and were referenced as occurring often during Social Studies classes Mr. Wallace taught. Finally, students often participated in whole group discussions. The discussions were more formal in that Mr. Wallace was the moderator or facilitator, but students were always eager to participate.

6. Teachers Provide “Coaching” as Reading Instructors

Mr. Wallace’s instructional planning worked as scaffolding for students’ learning in these classes. The previously discussed examples detailing how students built an understanding of debate and persuasion demonstrated the careful design of instruction that worked to increase student’s success during the class debates. Additionally, the frequent positive interactions between Mr. Wallace and the students in these classes combined with the scaffolding of activities provide evidence that “coaching” was evident in every class session. On September 25, students in core one participated in a comparison of three texts focusing on the Civil Rights Movement. Mr. Wallace’s coaching of students included comments such as “I like the use of quotes,” “Think about

the big picture,” and “What does this tell us?” On October 2, students discussed the impact of setting on literature. Mr. Wallace challenged students to think about historical perspectives during the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, Derrick was challenged to think about racism and how this would impact the perspective of others. These examples demonstrated the skillful coaching of students as they develop as readers.

Mr. Wallace’s Instructional Decisions in Relation to His Students’ Reading Development

There were several reoccurring qualities noted by the IRA (2000) as excellent teaching qualities in Mr. Wallace’s classroom, but there were also features of his classroom that were unique. First, the way Mr. Wallace talked to the students about what they needed as students and people was interesting and warrants further discussion. Second, the way Mr. Wallace structured instructional time seemed sensitive to the students’ academic needs. Third, the topics read and discussed in the class seemed mature and engaging.

1. “Coaching” That Reaches beyond Reading

Including the classroom observations for the pilot study, Mr. Wallace was observed by three different researchers, Dr. Colleen Fairbanks, Head of the Teacher Education and Higher Education Department at UNCG, Vickie Morefield, doctoral student, and Josh Brown, an undergraduate student.

Over 40 class observations were documented and 20 of those have been videotaped. I interviewed seven of the students from the two classes included in this study and interviewed Mr. Wallace two times. The most prominent characteristic of Mr. Wallace’s classroom was not the “coaching” referred to by the IRA (2000), although he

certainly coached students as readers. Rather, the evidence from 40 classroom observations, seven student interviews, and two interviews with Mr. Wallace suggested that he was much more than a “coach” of reading. He was also interested in and committed to coaching students as young people.

Mr. Wallace’s knack for talking with students was just that “a knack.” I used this word for lack of a researched term to fit this phenomenon. His voice was always soft and the volume did not fluctuate. When Mr. Wallace asked for the class’s attention, he simply said, “Guys.” The room fell silent. I rarely noted that he repeated himself to secure attention. Mr. Wallace praised students in a genuine manner that was always specific—for example, “good job transitioning from one activity to the next” or “nice job coming in this morning, guys” was noted during every class session. During one class observation, Mr. Wallace praised students 13 times. Every time the specific nature was given, and each time the praise seemed genuine. He did not seem to be overly friendly to or chummy with students, but the students seemed to hold him in high regard.

The general classroom environment in both classes seemed comfortable but business-like. Students came into the room, took out their work for the day, and read. Over the course of the observations, I noticed that very few students were pretend reading in core one or two. Students read a wide variety of texts from the *Harry Potter Series* (Rowling, 1998-2008) to *Sports Great Charles Barkley* (Macnow, 1998). The classroom was absolutely silent when students were reading independently and when students participated in creative writing assignments. This business-like environment seemed vital to the “coaching” that supported the reading identities in these classes. The idea that

learning would occur and that Mr. Wallace was there to help resonated throughout the video evidence.

Although Mr. Wallace was unfailingly supportive of students, he also held them to high academic and behavioral standards. For example, if Mr. Wallace felt like a student's writing or the work being shared with the class needed further polishing, he used the same tone and volume to help students improve. On one occasion, a student read his creative writing assignment. The student's work was repetitive and wandered from the topic. When the student finished reading, Mr. Wallace told the student that he liked the story idea and asked the student to think about how the piece sounded as he read to the class. Mr. Wallace's question to the reader was "What could you change to make it better?" The student recognized the repetition and said that he did not realize it was there until he read it out loud. Mr. Wallace told the class that reading a piece aloud helped to prevent this from occurring. This student did not appear to be discouraged or upset as he continued to raise his hand to share and contribute to the class discussion throughout the remainder of that class session. This coaching was specific and encouraging and was always directed at specific qualities of the piece.

Mr. Wallace rarely corrected behavior or redirected students. During one class observation, Mr. Wallace commented to one group that he had just about had enough of their off-task behavior today. The students at that group immediately stopped talking. Another time, he whispered to a male student to step into the hallway. I was watching the video and saw the student come back into the room before I realized that Mr. Wallace was talking with the student about his behavior or focus. I later asked Mr. Wallace about

this occurrence, and he responded that Micah had been in in-school suspension quite often last year. This particular discussion was not about Micah's misbehavior in a traditional sense, but about how he was not meeting the expectations Mr. Wallace believed Micah was capable of and as such his behavior impeded his learning. Mr. Wallace talked about the need to connect with his students on a personal level, and decided at the beginning of the year that he would reach out to Micah and work with him on his behavior and self-control. Apparently, Mr. Wallace encouraged Micah to join the wrestling team. I overheard Micah talking about the previous night's wrestling match before school started one morning, and he was clearly pleased with his victory. While Mr. Wallace's motivation for these connections seemed to be altruistic, these relationships did benefit the classroom atmosphere as these relationships became more important to the students.

During one of the observations, Mr. Wallace talked with students about the noise level in the hallway and how there was something going on in one of the school's neighborhoods that had "riled up" the students. Mr. Wallace told students that he expected them to be above this conflict and not get involved. This particular incident may be one of the clearest example of what I believe was Mr. Wallace's sincere and frank manner with the students. In the same calm, soft tone, he told students that he cared about them and expected them to set good examples—to be leaders. The message was I want you to be the example: "Others in the school look to you for what is right and wrong." In another observation, in which students were reading "Driving Miss Daisy" (Uhry, 1988), students talked about the inequities of the time period and how growing up for Hoke as

an African American male during the 1940s and 50s must have been difficult. The conversation focused on dealing with racism and feeling different from those around you. Mr. Wallace shared with the class that he was a minority growing up in the Bronx, and that as a minority it was difficult. Mr. Wallace did not directly compare his experience with Hoke's but indicated that being different does present challenges. The frank and open sharing of Mr. Wallace's life experiences could contribute to the "coaching" relationship that occurs with his students.

During student interviews, students commented that Mr. Wallace cared about them. According to the *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy: A Framework for Instruction and Policy* (Sturtevant et al., 2006), it is the connection between literacy in the classroom and out-of-school that is referred to as one of the three principled practices students need in order for adolescents to become good readers. Students shared their experiences and Mr. Wallace shared his making this connection one that can be added to the literature discussed in class.

During one of the student interviews, I asked Able how he found out about the books he was reading. Able answered that sometimes Mr. Wallace recommended a book or sometimes the librarian would help him. Other students commented that Mr. Wallace did not restrict their independent reading choices with the exception that students were required to read three novels during the first quarter and four during the second quarter. Each quarter one of the books read had to be nonfiction. As students described this requirement, they did not seem to be upset with it because Mr. Wallace explained the value of reading nonfiction texts.

The coaching that occurred in Mr. Wallace's classroom went beyond the coaching involved with strictly reading to that of coaching individuals who are becoming young adults. In his classrooms, students were expected to be engaged learners who met high academic expectations, but the coaching that occurred could be described as developing students' sense of themselves as people while they learned. It was about learning first, but it was also about becoming good people as that occurred.

2. The Structuring of Instructional Time That Seemed Sensitive to the Students' Academic Needs by Honoring the Students' Belief That They Could Reach the High Expectations of the Class

The IRA (2000) claims that excellent reading teachers must have an understanding of the development of reading and writing and possess a belief that all children can learn to read and write. I believe this "critical quality" is the foundation for something more in Mr. Wallace's classroom. The structuring of instructional time that honored the students' belief that they could reach high expectations will be highlighted through the following examples: (a) how the high expectations of the class are situated, (b) how time is managed to help students meet these expectations, (c) how self-selected reading honors students' academic needs, and (d) how journal writing honors the academic needs of the students.

Situating high expectations that honor students. Comments such as, "Yes, start making those connections in your head" and "Take it [the creative writing assignment] in any direction you want" or "I forgot makes no sense" and "Don't say it's too hard and not try" told students that Mr. Wallace had high expectations for their work, and he believed in their ability to be successful. The atmosphere of success built by these comments, and

the activities leading up to them, let students know they could be successful with effort and dedication. Mr. Wallace talked with students about what the minimum expectations for any given assignment meant in terms of their work. He told students that when the criteria said minimum that was the least a student could do to receive an acceptable grade. Mr. Wallace challenged students to do more than the minimum. According to Mr. Wallace, core one continued to be minimalist in their work efforts unless he continually challenged them to rise above. Challenging students to go beyond the minimum while providing the verbal cues to help them do so require time and this structured time was a priority in his classes. Sturtevant et al. (2006) described this principled practice as one that is related to the context for learning. Students need time to participate in respectful environments where high expectations are set.

How time is managed to help students meet these expectations. Time management in Mr. Wallace's classes allowed students large chunks of time to develop as readers and writers. There was absolutely no down time. Students came into the classroom and set up for class, they began reading self-selected novels, or they worked to complete assignments that were due or had not been turned in yet. Twenty videoed sessions revealed no more than five students who were not engaged during independent reading or the work time offered at the beginning of each class session. Mr. Wallace was generally at the door or in the hallway as students entered the room. When he entered the room, he generally said "Good job, guys" or "Thanks for getting started" in the same low tone he used during instruction. Mr. Wallace had challenged the class to a 30 second transition time in between activities. This meant that students took no longer than 30

seconds to prepare for the next activity. No one went back into their notebooks during instruction time, during class discussion, or as students shared their creative writing. Mr. Wallace made comments like “We need to speed up just a little” or “Good transition, guys” or “We waste time when we talk during transitions” after these transitions. The high expectations of these classes were met in part because Mr. Wallace sanctioned time for students’ success.

How self-selected reading honors students’ academic needs. During the independent reading time, students read. There was no movement, no pencil sharpening, no looking for books, and no pretend reading. Students in both classes were engrossed in their novels. Mr. Wallace believed that students needed practice in reading nonfiction, yet honored students’ reading preferences for self-selected reading. One common theme among the seven students interviewed from Mr. Wallace’s class was “The room is quiet.” Students seemed to value the opportunity to read without interruption, and most students commented that more independent reading time would be appreciated. In this case, it seemed that when an environment was created where reading was prized as a time for no interruptions, the students in these classes embraced this time as important in developing their personal preferences in reading.

How journal writing honors the academic needs of the students. Students valued self-selected reading and the structured time for creative writing. For at least ten minutes, students were engaged in writing on a prompt that was teacher provided. This was a structured, uninterrupted ten minutes of writing time. Typically, students did not finish early. In fact, many students were still writing after the ten minutes lapsed, and Mr.

Wallace encouraged them to finish during the next day's work time. According to Mr. Wallace, the prompts were sentences that caught his attention from novels, newspapers, or those friends had given him. Each of the starters during the seven weeks period focused on creative writing prompts. Examples included: "At first it sounded like moaning, but then the moan turned to a shivering scream which seemed to vibrate the leaves above Sam's head" and "When I woke on a deserted island, I took a quick look around and the only sign of civilization was the newspaper pages that blew around on the sandy beach."

During each writing session, Mr. Wallace read the prompt and suggested at least one possible direction for writing, but then encouraged students to take the story wherever they wanted. Generally, Mr. Wallace urged students to think about their use of vocabulary, dialogue, flashbacks, foreshadowing, or dialect depending on the prompt. Additionally, he suggested that students read over their writing after they finished. Over the seven weeks of creative writing, Mr. Wallace talked with students about how this type of writing was like on demand writing and would help them when they were asked to write about other topics they might find difficult. He also told students that because so much of their writing in seventh grade was expository in nature this writing opportunity gave students an opportunity to have fun with writing while improving as writers.

Mr. Wallace set high expectations for the students in his classes and provided verbal cues for meeting these goals. In structuring time for students to engage in meaningful activities such as self-selected reading and journal writing, he provided a context for these high expectations to occur (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003).

3. Mature and Engaging Topics

The IRA (2000) lists the use of a variety of materials and texts for reading as a critical quality of excellent reading teachers. After analyzing the data from the observations, I believe that Mr. Wallace's decisions about the materials and texts used were meant to engage his students with topics that were mature and engaging for his students. For example, when reading "Driving Miss Daisy" (Uhry, 1988), one of the students appeared to be uncomfortable with calling Miss Daisy a racist. Mr. Wallace told the class not to be afraid of the word, and they should list this word as a character trait of Miss Daisy. This comment led to a frank discussion about the Jim Crow laws and the church bombings of the period. Students seemed engaged in the discussion and eager to share their knowledge of the time period. When asked how Mr. Wallace planned for the cultural diversity of the class, he talked about how this unit incorporated the historical and cultural diversity of the class. Understanding history and how both Mr. Wallace and his students fit in history was a priority for him. The selection of mature topics, such as racism, encouraged students to discuss these topics with support from texts to help clarify and/or challenge their thinking.

Another example of materials and texts that seemed to engage students in mature, meaningful discussions and writing assignments was the debatable topics. Students read from a variety of mature topics from cell phone usage at schools, dress code policies in schools, immigration laws, doping in sports, to the Olympics. Students read a host posting about a topic of their choice, and the original text was followed by 10-20 blogs both in support and in opposition to the topic. Mr. Wallace described the blog as a

meaningful experience for the students because they were allowed to read about topics that were of interest to them personally and to share their opinions both in favor and against a topic. I heard a Latino male read a moving piece on immigration reform, Sue wrote on the Olympics because she loved swimming, and Derrick wrote about SAT scores restricting college entrance for athletes because he loves basketball. These powerful pieces were written in part because the topics were mature and engaged the students in critical thinking.

Students in both core one and two did not report a love for all the texts and materials selected for in class reading, but they appeared to embrace the texts. It seemed that because Mr. Wallace indicated that they were important, students tended to believe in their potential. Student interviews confirmed that the Civil Rights Movement was not the most interesting topic for some of the students in Mr. Wallace's class, but all of the students described enjoyment in reading "Driving Miss Daisy" (Uhry, 1988) and overall they valued reading about this time period. Every student indicated a connection to the debatable topics readings and believed these topics were relevant to their personal lives. The instructional decision to use mature topics that were relevant to the students in these classes often produced discussions that were engaging and discussions in which most students participated with zeal. Mr. Wallace described the selection of materials and topics as important. We [the English language arts department] are looking for "things that the kids would be more connected to." This understanding promoted an environment in which students seemed motivated to learn.

Teaching Practices in Support of Students' Identities as Readers

The data sources analyzed and reviewed for this case revealed that students in these classes generally position themselves as capable readers. The students interviewed for this study, the students participating in the reading interest surveys, and the students completing the tickets out the door combined with the videotaped class sessions and the field notes confirmed these findings. Students in these classes overwhelmingly pointed to time for independent reading as important to their reading. Students noted that they felt connected to the novels they read and with this engagement came engaged reading. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) made the claim that independent reading should be moved to the forefront of instruction for this reason. More often than not, students described their positions as readers in terms of the books they read during this structured class time.

The use of grammar instruction, creative writing time, and debatable topics were also described as helpful because students were given time to engage with print and non-print sources, think critically about these sources, and generate new and novel ideas from these sources. While students did not always love the anchoring assignments, they recognized value in completing them. Students named texts read during these observations as interesting and important to their reading. Finally, students described debates and their experiences with argumentation with passion and conviction. Larry described these experiences as being more than what he would do in the real world. It seemed that when reading engaged students in topics that were relevant to the students and required students to think critically about these topics, opportunities became

available for students' reading identities to take form and re-form as these opportunities continued.

Mr. Wallace's skillful implementation of the six critical qualities of knowledge and practice of excellent reading teachers warrants recognition here. He seemed to understand that students needed time to develop as readers and writers, and they could do so given sequential instructional in support of this development. In using students' daily work assignments and more formal assessments, Mr. Wallace "coached" students as readers and writers. In these classes, reading and writing included a variety of materials and texts that were relevant for his students. The ways in which these texts were used to orchestrate reading and writing experiences were clearly defined for students and occurred using flexible grouping. Students might work independently, with a partner, or a group, but it was the purpose of the activity that determined how students would work. The learning environment created through the implementation of these qualities provided an atmosphere where students could form and re-form reading identities.

Overall, students in these classes claimed success as readers. While these findings are not intended to be used as generalizations, it does seem that students who were reading more and were more engaged as readers would be forming and re-forming their identities as readers. What they liked to read, how often they read, and how they read was subject to change, but it seemed that reading instruction in these classes was working to promote students' identities as readers by structuring classroom time for students to engage in meaningful reading and writing activities. The instructional design in these classes seemed to meet students' needs and challenged them as readers and writers, and

students in these classes believed in their capabilities as readers. Mr. Wallace's commitment to coaching students both in the class and outside the class mirrored a desire to build long-term relationships with his students, and these relationships seemed important to the students and Mr. Wallace. This commitment seemed to improve the climate of the classroom and encouraged the positive ways in which students talked about reading and the learning that accompanied it. Reading instruction anchored in mature and engaging texts and topics that were relevant to his students created an environment that motivated students to find value in reading. Students in these classes not only claimed success as readers, they seemed motivated and eager to participate in the activities offered.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

Data support the claim that both Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace enacted the IRA's (2000) critical qualities of knowledge and practices of excellent reading teachers. One teacher might be more consistent or skillful enacting one quality than the other, but the evidence supported the persistent and masterful use of the IRA (2000) standards in these classes. The implementation of these critical qualities worked in orchestration with the teacher's dispositions about teaching and learning in ways that supported the literacy growth of their students. In supporting literacy growth, I believe teachers supported the reading identities of these diverse students (Sturtevant et al., 2006). These teachers intentionally designed instruction that scaffolded the use of language as a *psychological tool* to mediate new learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986) and created classroom environments that centered on such learning.

This chapter will analyze findings from Chapter IV (Ms. Gables's case) and Chapter V (Mr. Wallace's case) for ways in which these students describe learning, particularly learning about reading. This analysis will answer the research question: What relationships exist among the instructional practices of reading teachers, how students define good readers, and students' reading identities? I present Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace's data findings together using the following format. In keeping with Alvermann

et al. (1998), I will present the most important voice of the classroom first—the students’ voices. How students describe and understand the reading instruction in their classroom will then be used to make sense of how the teacher’s principled practices and proclivities support students’ descriptions and understanding of reading.

Discussion

In reviewing the student data for both cases, I found that students described reading articulately. Students believed that reading instruction was important, should be engaging, and was enjoyable when reading was a comfortable fit and produced meaning. These understandings about their learning will be used in the following discussion.

Reading Instruction Should Be Purposeful and Connect to the Students’ Lives

Students in Ms. Gables’s classes understood that reading should have a purpose and that this purpose should be connected to their lives and futures. Kate, from core two, talked about writing the leadership-focused children’s book with a partner. Looking beyond the actual reading and writing, Kate described the importance of learning to work with others “when you get older and you get a job you’re going to have to work with people and if you don’t know how you probably won’t have a job for very long.” Kate, like other students in these classes, understood that people must interact within their world to construct new learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Connor, a student who did not particularly like reading, talked about the reading logs, “In fifth grade I didn’t read any book(s) because we didn’t have a log, but I would read some and just stop but I think now I actually like reading some stuff.” Connor’s use of the reading log as a *psychological tool* became the essential link in actually reading “some stuff” this year

(John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). This sense of purpose and connectedness was central to the instruction designed for the students in these classes. Ms. Gables explained that, “I think it’s important to maximize those [personal] experiences and making it more meaningful, not wasting time on stuff that’s not valuable or doesn’t make a difference.”

In Mr. Wallace’s classes, students also described reading as purposeful and connected to life when reading involved a transaction that was “more than the words on a page” and when the reader “can apply those to real-life situations.” Mary described making purposeful connections after reading an article about patriotism. She connected to the article, “because I hadn’t really thought about whether or not people are patriotic or not in America. And not really everyone in America is as committed to patriotism in the country and I think that’s an important issue.” Implicit in Mary’s comment is a sense of learning related to what she discovered through this reading experience not just reading for school but reading for a greater understanding of the world around her. Alvermann et al. (1998) described literacy that encapsulates power through an *absent presence* as one that is dominated by a Western view of thinking where literacy is a neutral act. The skillful selection of texts encouraged students to make personal connections and challenge this *absent presence*. Mr. Wallace described selecting topics “that were more related to the kids like SMOD—things that the kids would be more connected to.” Reading for a purpose that helped students make personal connections was one way in which Mr. Wallace helped his students understand the topic and improve their reading.

The students in this study understood that reading instruction in their classes was meant to be purposeful, and their understandings of what seemed purposeful for their reading development (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Ivey, 2002; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; S. Miller, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1982) were echoed throughout the data sources. The student participants in this study positioned their personal reading through experiences with the texts they read in class (Faircloth, 2009; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Moje, 2002) and even more often through their independent reading (S. Miller & Faircloth, 2008; Pitcher et al., 2010). Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace felt that learning about students' preferences through the "reading logs" and selecting relevant texts for reading assignments was important for supporting students' reading development and their reading identities (Fairbanks, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Sturtevant et al., 2006; Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). Students in these classes seemed to believe their teachers' instructional decisions provided them with ways to find a purpose in reading and to make personal connections with what they read.

Reading Instruction Should Be Responsive and Engaging to Students

The reading instruction in these classes connected responsiveness and engagement in two significant ways for the students in this study. Students' independent reading and the relevant, high-challenge tasks were both engaging and responsive to the needs and interests of the students. Students in both Ms. Gables's and Mr. Wallace's classes frequently described reading engagement in terms of their independent reading (Casey, 2008; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Leander & Zacher, 2007; S. Miller & Faircloth, 2008; Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). According to Hidi and Renninger (2006), the interest

level in a learning activity has a powerful influence on learning. Students in Ms. Gables's classes described engagement in reading as important for their reading development. Molly, who positioned herself as a struggling reader, spoke passionately about Joan Lowery Nixon's (2012) novel, *Nobody's There*. Molly described the challenges of remembering what she read, comprehending texts, and answering questions related to the text. Still, when Molly talked about this book, she used words like "it tucks me in" and "I really liked the part where." This quiet, reserved student spoke more about independent reading than any other topic during the interview.

Able, a focal student from Mr. Wallace's core one, positioned himself as a student who was "getting better" but did not typically love to read. However he spoke with such enthusiasm about the Alex Rider Series (Horowitz, 2000-2006), it was difficult to believe he was the same student who reported spending little time reading. Able was engaged in part because of his travels to the Middle East visiting family, and these personal experiences helped him create new understandings with the novel series (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students in Mr. Wallace's classes consistently spoke about the time set aside for self-selected reading (Sturtevant et al., 2006) as a time to read books they were interested in reading and not something imposed on them.

During the teacher interviews, both Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace, talked about their decision to include independent reading time in much the same terms that Molly spoke of her favorite novel. Ms. Gables believed that by sanctioning independent reading time she demonstrated that "it's important" to read, and that "we spend time doing it

because it's something good to do." Mr. Wallace believed that for students to enjoy reading they must have time to read (Ivey, 2002; Sturtevant et al., 2006).

Students in both Ms. Gables's and Mr. Wallace's classes frequently reported that reading and writing activities that were engaging and meaningful were activities where high-challenge tasks replaced low-challenge tasks (S. Miller, 2003). For example, six focal students from Ms. Gables's classes who participated in interviews spoke avidly about their engagement with the high-challenge of creating a children's picture book demonstrating their understanding of leadership. Ms. Gables's careful scaffolding of the readings and activities leading up to this high-challenge task (S. Miller, 2003) reflected how she adapted instruction to fit the needs of her students (Fairbanks, 2000; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). The children's book was a culminating activity for their leadership unit and required students to incorporate their understanding of the texts read during the unit. It spanned several days, and students repeatedly described it as an engaging activity that helped them connect with the material. Students spoke enthusiastically about their story ideas, and when asked to talk more about the leadership traits included in their story, students were able to provide this information.

High-challenge tasks (S. Miller, 2003) were a hallmark of Mr. Wallace's classes as well, and students spoke positively about them. Specifically, the instructional design of the persuasive and argumentative units thoughtfully guided students in the reading of texts that were personally meaningful and allowed students to see how others voiced personal opinions and supported these opinions. Students read about multiple topics, selected a topic of interest, wrote about that topic, and then participated in a class debate

using argumentative and persuasive skills. These learning experiences engaged students in challenging tasks that afforded these students opportunities to construct their own meanings and their own positions on topics they cared about (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Leander & Zacher, 2007). The complex nature of debating was not only embraced by the students in Mr. Wallace's classes they also took on the challenge with zeal.

Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace understood that students yearn for reading experiences that are responsive to their personal needs and engages students in relevant topics (Alvermann et al., 1998). S. Miller (2003) described the use of high-challenge tasks as those that are motivating and require more sophisticated cognitive reasoning. Sixth- and seventh-grade students in this study participated in these high-challenge tasks creating learning environments that encouraged participation in literacy learning experiences that were meaningful (Fairbanks, 2000; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). Moje (2002) described this "re-framing" of adolescent literacy as necessary for understanding how students learn complex literacy practices and reinvent these literacies within new contexts.

Reading Instruction Should Be a Comfortable Fit to Lead to Understanding

The students in this study believed reading should be a comfortable fit and that it should produce understanding (Pitcher et al., 2010; Rosenblatt, 1982). Both Ms. Gables's and Mr. Wallace's students recognized that a "comfortable fit" could be different in the context of the classroom (Campbell, 2007). Throughout the data sources, teachers explained their decision to use some of the texts suggested by their school system, while at other times selecting texts more in line with their students' proclivities and reading

needs. Ms. Gables talked about text selection in terms of students' needs. This working within students' *zone of proximal development* was evident throughout the data sources (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). For example, "more experienced as readers," "can tackle it on their own," and "we need to break this down and scaffold it for this particular group" seemed to put voice to decisions about the text selection. When asked about her decision to use texts that were not on the suggested list, she replied, "They [the texts] are suggestions. I am a professional, I am educated and I can make decisions. I need to make decisions based on what is best for my kids."

Students in Mr. Wallace's classes voiced a belief that reading should be comfortable in producing personal understanding, and in Mr. Wallace's ability to facilitate this understanding. Able equated comfort and understanding with "trying to find ways that kids can enjoy reading." Abhriham believed that comfortable reading reflected how students felt about the complexity of the reading. He explained that teachers should "help them [students] understand what the material is really about." Derrick believed that students liked to read in a variety of ways (out loud, in groups, and independently) and that each way had advantages for the student. Students seemed to believe that Mr. Wallace's decisions about the texts read in class as well as how these texts would be read were based on the students' best interest.

Both Mr. Wallace and Ms. Gables understood that students must meet the reading challenges of more complex texts, yet these challenges could not overwhelm and discourage their students (IRA, 2000; Lapp & Fisher, 2009). Ms. Gables's instructional decisions asked, "How do we need to break this down and scaffold it for this particular

group?” Explicit in her decision-making was an understanding that all students could not access the text in the same way (Bitter, O’Day, Gubbins, & Socias, 2009; Sealy-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). Ms. Gables understood that some students were “more experienced as readers, they’re more mature and proficient,” and as such could tackle more challenging texts (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). The diverse make-up of Ms. Gable’s and Mr. Wallace’s classes required teachers to consider the role they played in bringing the text, reader, and the context of school together for students to build new understandings (Lee, 2007). The instruction observed in these classes, and the student’s articulated need for comfortable reading activities created an environment where reading identities could take shape (Bitter et al., 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000).

Reading Instruction Should Be Important

Students in both Ms. Gables’s and Mr. Wallace’s classes described reading as important to their success as students and to their futures. Students’ consistent reference to themselves as readers who “were getting better” suggested that their teachers supported and promoted reading activities designed for these positive reading changes to occur. In Ms. Gables’s classes, students talked about reading as important to their ability to change the world, to get a good education, and go to college. Donna, a core one focal student, had clearly re-shaped her reading identity from that of a struggling eight-year old reader to someone who could see the potential to get a college scholarship (Leander & Zacher, 2007). Connor positioned himself as “getting better” as a reader and talked about how his reading could lead to a good education and a good job. Moreover, Ms. Gables’s students seemed to believe that the instruction in their classes would help them achieve

these goals. Over 50% of the students taking the Kelley and Decker (2009) reading motivation survey believed reading was “very important,” and another 27% claimed reading was “important.” Students in Mr. Wallace’s classes often talked about reading as a means of gaining knowledge and information. Students in these classes valued reading in similar ways as those in Ms. Gables’s classes.

Both Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace instilled the sense that reading was important albeit in somewhat different ways. Mr. Wallace used mature topics (voting age, immigration reform, the use of SAT scores, “Driving Miss Daisy”) while Ms. Gables connected texts to students’ cultural backgrounds (Roberto Clemente, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks). As students learned from texts that appealed to their various interests, structures were created that respected the diversity of the students (Sealy-Ruiz & Greene, 2011), and provided students with experiences connecting what they read to why reading itself was important.

Sturtevant et al. (2006) described the principled practices present in instructional settings supporting adolescent literacy growth as those that focused on the context for learning, the instructional practices of the teacher, and the connections between literacy in the home and at school. I believe that Ms. Gables’s and Mr. Wallace’s instructional decisions epitomize these principled practices. The instructional decisions they made were at times implicit and at others explicit but were consistently aimed at supporting students’ reading identities. Students were keenly aware of the importance of constructing meaning from the texts they read (Greene et al., 1989; Moje, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1982). Additionally, students seemed to believe their teachers designed

instruction to encourage their success even when the text complexity was slightly beyond the reach of the student (Lewis & del Valle, 2009; S. Miller & Faircloth, 2008).

Both the teachers and the students in these classes seemed to share a common belief that reading was important, and in order to construct meaning from text outside support was sometimes necessary. According to Guthrie and Cox (2001), teachers who create classrooms that are motivating and engaging understand what students in this study confirmed. First, reading should have a purpose and personally connect through their reading logs, anchoring assignments, and finding meaning in what they read (Bitter et al., 2009; Moje et al., 2004). Second, reading should be engaging as evidenced through texts that are interesting and connect to the students' lives (Leander & Zacher, 2007; Moje, 2002). Third, reading should be about the importance of the transaction (Fairbanks, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1982). Hall and Piazza (2008) described language as a social tool used for learning and shaping identities. These teachers used knowledge about their students to select important texts, build a context in which learning was valued, and as a result in this space, both students and teachers developed a shared belief that reading was important (Lee, 2007; Roth & Lee, 2007; Vetter et al., 2011).

Conclusions

The student diversity represented in this study provides a view of what was important to students who may be historically considered disenfranchised in school (Lee, 2007; S. Miller & Faircloth, 2008). Over 50% of the students in these classes were considered students of color. The school itself has a free and reduced lunch rate of 51%. Yet, the findings presented here chronicle academically thriving classrooms where

students and teachers seemed to be respectful and accepting of one another, and where a mutual desire to improve literacy learning was pervasive. Students in these classes were actively engaged in literacy activities, and they believed participating in these activities would help them become better readers (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). Teachers in this study pushed back against the deficit thinking Lee (2007) described as a *structural difference* for their students. The instructional emphasis on relevance in reading coupled with the high expectations teachers set for their students were met with attendant support. The use of multicultural texts pushed against the privileging of one group of students over another based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, or national identity. The conclusions and implications will address the ways in which teachers and students are meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing world (Blanton et al., 2007; Gee, 2011).

Excellent Teachers Help Students Believe They Can Become Better Readers

Students in these classes believed their reading was improving and their teachers were supporting their efforts. Sometimes students were explicit in how they described their teacher's support. Derrick said, "It [creative writing and grammar] was to help us with our writing and our vocabulary. Like it would, like you know . . . help us read better." At other times students' comments were implicit, but allowed the researcher to understand the intent. Molly said reading a drama as a class would be better for her but was unable to say more than it would help her. Understanding that Molly was a struggling reader who needed support with some texts helped explain why this support was needed.

The participants in this study agreed that reading activities must be engaging, connect to their lives, and be a comfortable fit to provide meaning. Students believed that reading was important and that their teachers were helping them become better readers. The use of flexible grouping and the scaffolding of skills and instruction helped students acquire and use psychological tools to mediate learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). Teachers explained how and why they selected relevant texts to engage students in a way that privileged the needs of the students (Alvermann et al., 1998). The number of students, who voiced positive feelings about the importance of reading and the pleasure students attached to the instructional activities, suggested these students believed the activities of the classroom supported their identities as readers who were “getting better.” Teachers who are knowledgeable about students’ reading proclivities and how to approach reading instruction required a thorough knowledge of reading development as well as adolescent learning.

Excellent Teaching Does Not Fit a Scripted Pattern

The teacher participants in this study were quite different, and each had unique and effective ways to support their students’ literacy and learning. Both teachers structured time for independent reading and large blocks of time for reading activities. Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace were organized and there was no “down time.” They believed that students needed to be actively engaged in the practices of reading and writing. Mr. Wallace, for example, approached his teaching by using more technology with his students, while Ms. Gables pulled reading topics from a variety of available print sources. The structure of the classes was similar with the exception of the isolated

vocabulary instruction in Ms. Gables's classes, which Mr. Wallace substituted with creative writing and grammar. Although their classroom structures varied, the instructional decisions of both teachers were consistently informed by students' literacy and learning needs than outside influences.

Excellent Teachers Are Confident Teachers Who Adapt, Adopt, or Resist Teaching Practices Based on the Needs of Their Students

Both teachers were confident in their professional ability to determine what was in the best interest of their students. Sometimes this confidence led teachers to adopt a reading practice, sometimes it led the teacher to adapt the reading practice, and sometimes it led the teacher to resist the practice. Although teachers consistently demonstrated clarity in their decision-making, two examples will be used to showcase how this professional confidence was rooted in their fundamental concern for students' literacy and learning. Ms. Gables described her thought process in selecting different texts to use with her classes. Rather than use the texts and lesson plans suggested by her school district, she explained that using one or two chapters from two different novels and then comparing these texts to movie clips would not help her students develop the nonfiction reading skills they needed. Ms. Gables decided to use autobiographies instead. Mr. Wallace found a link for the *New York Times* debatable topics in the resource section of his school district's plan. He commented that as he read over the topics and posts, it became clear students would find these topics relevant and engaging. Mr. Wallace designed plans that would incorporate this resource rather than those suggested by the school district. Excellent teachers make instructional decisions such as these based on their students' literacy needs (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986), and their

students seemed convinced that their teachers' decisions would improve their literacy learning.

Yes, Students Do Understand What It Means to Be a Good Reader

Students in sixth grade and seventh grade described what it meant to be a good reader in similar ways. Both sixth- and seventh-grade readers believed good readers make meaning from texts. This understanding was important in different ways. Seventh graders explained how good readers make connections with the text and were comfortable with their reading level. These students talked about reading a variety of texts and connecting not only with other texts in English language arts but with other content areas as well. Sixth-grade readers described a good reader as being fluent both orally and silently. I believe this may be in part due to the emphasis of fluency checks in elementary school, but there also seemed to be a connection between the number of students who did not like to read orally and students' perceptions of their reading skills (Kelley & Decker, 2009). Finally, sixth-graders believed being a good reader could lead to college, and while seventh-graders did not talk about reading in this way, they did express a belief that reading was important to their academic success.

Excellent Teachers Understand that Learning Begins with Strong Relationships

Both Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace emphasized the importance of relationship building in their classrooms. Students seemed to respect one another and their teachers, and this attitude was reciprocated. These respectful relationships established a foundation for the business-like atmosphere of the classes. Both teachers were friendly to their students, but it was not in a friend-like manner. Students seemed to know their teachers

were there to teach, yet the atmosphere was comfortable. Students articulated the ways in which the instructional practices of the class helped them increase their vocabulary, increase reading comprehension, and find enjoyment from their reading. The central business of the class was reading and literacy.

In these classrooms, students were shaping and re-shaping their identities toward becoming better readers. Their teachers were able to orchestrate the complexities of classrooms where students, their interests, and their needs remained at the center of their instructional decision-making (Moll, 2001). The teachers and students in these classes also shared a sense of purpose in making literacy matter (Alvermann et al., 1998). Over time the instructional practices of the teachers in these classes showed students what they could accomplish and their reading identities reflected this hopefulness (Wortham, 2011).

Implications

These research findings have strong implications for classroom teachers, teacher education programs, and future research. The overwhelming presence of the students' voices provided through these data sources yield ideas that should be used to design instruction, structure the class, and support the reading identities in diverse middle schools (Alvermann et al., 1998).

1. Both classroom teachers and teacher education programs should consider the benefits of taking the time to truly know their students as people and learners before jumping into teaching. The impact of building a responsive and engaging learning environment was evident throughout the data sources included in this study. Building this responsive environment should begin

with reading surveys such as those included in this study to determine what motivates students to read (Kelley & Decker, 2009) and about their reading preferences (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000). Using tickets out the door can provide teachers with critical information about how students view their reading on a particular day, the perceived value of the reading instruction, and/or what the student learned. These tickets provide reading identity snapshots and can create a pattern for students and teachers to use as talking points for literacy discussions.

2. Classroom teachers should use the knowledge they gain from their students to select texts that are both engaging and relevant. Hidi and Renninger (2006) explained the need for supporting engagement in an activity as critical. Students who find a text relevant will be more successful in this sustained engagement.
3. Classroom teachers may be tempted to eliminate self-selected reading from their class structure to meet the current curriculum and testing demands. This would be a mistake, as students prefer fictional texts and value choice (Ivey, 2002). Preserving this time would also allow students the time to nurture their personal passions in reading.
4. Classroom teachers must understand how to scaffold reading activities and texts in an effort to create learning environments focused on students' construction of knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986).

Providing opportunities for students to work with a variety of texts in a variety of ways works to support students' reading identities.

5. Classroom teachers must understand that sometimes "less is more." The temptation to include more reading tasks or more reading texts to meet curriculum demands may be greater than ever before. In fact, this study confirmed that high-challenge tasks that require more time and higher-level thinking actually produced powerful results in terms of how students perceived learning (S. Miller, 2003).
6. Teacher education programs should enlist educators like Ms. Gables and Mr. Wallace as cooperating teachers and mentors for teachers entering the profession. Building a network of teachers who share ideas as openly and honestly as the participants in this study would produce an environment for great teaching to flourish.
7. Teacher education programs should examine the structures, goals, and outcomes of classrooms such as those described in this study to serve as possible models for new teachers. Understanding that two excellent teachers think differently about some aspects of their teaching would help new teachers begin to find their voice and confidence as teachers.
8. Future research should examine the long-term effects of excellent teaching on reading identities. How do students who participate in this type of exemplary instruction view reading after three years or five years?

9. Future research should continue to build on the instructional practices chronicled in this study. How teachers view their instructional practices provides more information for practicing teachers and teacher education programs.

Limitations

There were several threats to the validity of this study. While careful consideration was given to the teacher selection, I selected these teachers based on previous professional experiences, the recommendation of the principal, and the results from the pilot study. I worked with both teachers at Lakeside for several years so my professional bias was a concern for data analysis. The use of multiple data collection tools helped address this validity threat. Maxwell (2005) described rich data as a strategy to provide a full and rich picture of what is being studied. The use of videotaped classroom observations (40, 20 per teacher), field notes (40, 20 per teacher), two student reading surveys (118 total), 13 student interviews, the teachers' interviews (2, 1 per teacher), and the tickets out the door (653 total) helped to address this specific validity threat. Additionally, my committee chair served as a critical friend for my data analysis.

Selection of the focal participants was also a threat to the study's validity because these students included only those students who returned parental consent forms. I planned to select five students from each class for a total of 20 students, but only 13 students provided parental consent and student assent. According to Maxwell (2005), the purposeful selection of students may provide a positive and negative student input. I believe the diversity of the students was representative of the school. Further, I realized

students' comments during interviews might be misinterpreted, so I asked for clarification throughout the interviews. Each interview was transcribed for analysis allowing me to recheck data as needed. Maxwell (2005) suggested the use of respondent validation to guard against this threat, therefore "member checking" with the participant teachers was used as a validity check.

Another limitation of the interviews was my concern about how forthcoming students and teachers would be during the interviews. Maxwell (2005) explained that making the students and teachers comfortable and assuring anonymity would help minimize this potential threat. I addressed this threat by reassuring students and teachers their names would not be mentioned and by collaborating with the participants about the classroom observations. I used the interview protocol with both students and teacher to provide continuity, but I also asked about the classroom videoed evidence.

This study called for the completion of two reading surveys. The Ivey and Broaddus (2001) and the Kelley and Decker (2009) surveys were also completed only by those students whose parents provided consent and who provided assent. There were 121 students enrolled in the four classes, and 66 students returned parental consent forms. However, there were only 118 surveys. While these data were important in understanding what motivates students to read and what they liked to read, less than half of the students enrolled in the classes completed the surveys so no claims can be made about the degree to which they represent the students as whole.

As a full-time teacher and doctoral student, I could not collect all of the data personally. I had two research assistants who helped in collecting the classroom

observation data. On the first observation date, midway through the data collection, and on the last collection date, I personally collected data from both Ms. Gables's and Mr. Wallace's classes. At first, I thought this would be a limitation, but I believe it served as a form member checking. I watched the videotaped sessions first, wrote my first impressions of the class, and then read the field notes. This process helped me check my analysis against the observations and perceptions of my colleagues.

The final limitation of this study was the reporting of data in a manner that is objective and credible (Maxwell, 2005). I sought feedback from my committee chair to guard against my bias and the assumptions that I made from the data. In anticipation of the ethical dilemmas associated with this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011); the research problem was examined in terms of its benefit to the individuals being studied.

Final Thoughts

This study demonstrated that excellent teachers know their students and use this knowledge to design instruction to best fit their needs. While excellent teachers share some teaching characteristics, it is evident that how teachers structure their classes and design instruction is based on their proclivities in concert with this extensive knowledge about their students. Excellent teachers are confident and reflective about their instructional decisions, and their ability to connect with students is basic to encouraging the development of their identities as confident and skillful readers.

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APPENDIX A
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol:

Research: We learn more about the practices middle school students describe as being helpful in developing positive reading identities.

Student activities: What are the students doing?
How long do students participate in this activity?
How do they participate in this activity? (independently, partner, small group, whole class)

Student engagement: What type of conversation occurs during the activity?
What is student's body language during the activity? (leaning in, pulling back, head on desk)
Do students seem confident in their ability to complete the assignment? (Do students ask questions, begin immediately, and ask the teacher or classmates for help?)

Student production: What are students expected to produce?
How is the work from this activity connected to other activities?

Teacher interactions: How does the teacher engage students with the activity?
(activate prior knowledge, pre-teach vocabulary, brainstorm)
Where is the teacher positioned as the activity is introduced?
Where is the teacher as the activity progress?
What are her interactions with students during the activity?

APPENDIX B
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview questions for teachers:

Purpose: To build a more thorough understanding of how teachers' instructional decisions in reading may help shape students' identities as readers.

1. What constitutes engagement in literacy learning?
2. How do you support your students' literacy development?
3. What is most important to you in your instructional planning?
4. What role does technology play in your instructional planning?
5. When you look at your classroom how do you know when students view themselves as readers? (Prompt with engaged readers, confident readers, flexible readers, critical readers to address the reading identities that are examined in this study.)
6. How do you use your knowledge of students' cultural and social diversity in instructional planning decisions?
7. How would you describe a typical class?
8. How would you describe the students you teach?
9. How would you describe the focus students included in this study?

APPENDIX C**MOTIVATION TO READ PROFILE**

Motivation to Read Profile

Adapted version of “The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) Survey” (Kelley & Decker, 2009)

Directions: Please read each sentence. Read each possible answer. Choose the answer that best describes how you feel by checking by that response.

I am in:

- sixth grade
 seventh grade

I am a:

- female
 male

1. My friends think that I am:

- a very good reader.
 a good reader.
 an ok reader.
 a poor reader.

2. Reading a book is something I like to do _____.

- never.
 not very often.
 sometimes.
 often.

3. I read _____.

- not as well as my friends.
 about the same as my friends.
 a little better than my friends.
 a lot better than my friends.

4. My best friends think reading is _____.

- cool.
 fun.
 okay to do.
 not any fun.

5. When I come to a word I do not know, I can _____.
- _____ almost always figure it out.
 - _____ sometimes figure it out.
 - _____ almost never figure it out.
 - _____ never figure it out.
6. I share good books I've read with friends.
- _____ I never do this.
 - _____ I almost never do this.
 - _____ I do this some of the time.
 - _____ I do this a lot.
7. When I am reading by myself, I understand _____.
- _____ almost everything I read.
 - _____ some of what I have read.
 - _____ almost none of what I have read.
 - _____ none of what I have read.
8. People who read a lot are _____.
- _____ very interesting.
 - _____ interesting.
 - _____ not very interesting.
 - _____ boring.
9. I am _____.
- _____ a poor reader.
 - _____ an okay reader.
 - _____ a good reader.
 - _____ an excellent reader.
10. I think libraries are _____.
- _____ a great place to spend time.
 - _____ an interesting place to spend time.
 - _____ an okay place to spend time.
 - _____ a boring place to spend time.
11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading _____.
- _____ every day.
 - _____ almost every day.
 - _____ once in a while.
 - _____ never.

12. Knowing how to read well is _____.
- _____ not very important to me.
 - _____ sort of important to me.
 - _____ important.
 - _____ very important.
13. When my teacher asks me a question about something I have read, I _____.
- _____ can't think of an answer.
 - _____ have trouble thinking of an answer.
 - _____ sometimes think of an answer.
 - _____ always think of an answer.
14. I think reading is _____.
- _____ a boring way to spend time.
 - _____ an okay way to spend time.
 - _____ an interesting way to spend time.
 - _____ a cool way to spend time.
15. Reading is _____.
- _____ very easy for me.
 - _____ kind of easy for me.
 - _____ kind of difficult for me.
 - _____ very hard for me.
16. When I am older I will spend _____.
- _____ none of my time reading.
 - _____ very little of my time reading.
 - _____ some of my time reading.
 - _____ a lot of my time reading.
17. When I am in a group talking about books or texts, I _____.
- _____ almost never talk about my ideas.
 - _____ sometimes talk about my ideas.
 - _____ almost always talk about my ideas.
 - _____ always talk about my ideas.
18. I would like for my teacher to read books out loud to my class _____.
- _____ every day.
 - _____ almost every day.
 - _____ once in a while.
 - _____ never.

19. When I read out loud, I am _____.

_____ a poor reader.

_____ okay reader.

_____ a good reader.

_____ a very good reader.

20. When I receive a book as a gift I feel _____.

_____ very happy.

_____ sort of happy.

_____ not great.

_____ unhappy.

21. Do you read outside of school?

_____ I never do this.

_____ I almost never do this.

_____ I do this some of the time.

_____ I do this a lot.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT INTEREST SURVEY

Student Interest Survey

Adapted from: "Just plain reading": A Survey of What Makes Students Want to Read in Middle School Classrooms" (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001)

1. Which reading activities do you enjoy most? (You may check more than one.)

- Teacher reading out loud
- Students reading out loud
- Free reading time (like DEAR or silent reading time)
- Musicians
- Reading with the whole class
- Reading stories, plays and poetry out loud
- Discussion groups
- Reading from a textbook
- Other (explain) _____

2. If you read, why do you like to read? (Check all that apply.)

- It's fun
- To learn something
- It's relaxing
- There's nothing else to do
- I get attached to the characters
- I get caught up in the story

3. What do you like to read? (You may check more than one.)

- Novels/chapter books
- mysteries
- fantasy
- adventure
- history
- books about people your age
- scary stories
- books in a series like (Diary of Wimpy Kid, Lightning Thief, Alex Rider, Twilight)
- other (explain) _____
- Picture books
- Poetry books
- Information books (sports, animals, science, history)
- Magazines
- Online magazines, websites, other

- Newspaper
 Comic books
 Other _____
-

4. What do you like to read about at home? (You may check more than one.)

- Celebrities
 Sports figures
 People/characters like me
 Musicians
 People my age who have done some cool or amazing things
 Animals
 Fantasy characters
 People/characters my age who are dealing with tough issues, like drug abuse or crime.
 People/characters a lot different from me
 Historical figures

5. How often do you read these things at home?

- 30 minutes each week
 1 hour each week
 more than 1 hour each week

6. What's something you read in this class that you liked? _____

How did you read this text?

- With a small group
 With a friend in class
 By yourself
 As a class

7. What's a good book that you read this year? _____

8. How often do you use online sources (YouTube, Facebook, online games)?

APPENDIX E
STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research: To learn more about the practices middle school students describe as being helpful in developing positive reading identities.

1. Describe yourself as a reader.
Follow up questions:
 - Do you like to read?
 - What do you like to read? (Anything else?)
 - How often do you read without being asked to read?
 - What do you like most about reading in your classroom? (Anything more you would like to add?)
 - What do you like least about reading in your classroom? (Can you think of anything else?)
 - Is it important that books represent your life experiences? (Tell me more.)
2. In general, what does it mean to be a good reader?
(Anything else)
3. In this classroom, what does it mean to be a good reader?
(probe with: Can you think of anything else?)
4. Who are the good readers in your classroom?
(Why are they good readers?)
5. Tell me about the reading activities in your classroom. (Follow up with: anything else. Tell me more about that activity. List the activities on index cards as they are named.)
6. Can you tell me about something you have read or an activity you completed that really connected with your personal life? (Tell me more about this.)
7. Tell me about _____ (specific activities from the classroom video).
8. Tell me about how you use technology? (Probe: at home and at school. Also, explain that technology could be Facebook, texting, emailing, gaming, using the Internet, blogging.)

APPENDIX F
STUDENT REFLECTIONS

A. Circle the picture that describes how you think of yourself as a reader today.



Explain why you chose this picture.

B. Choose the adjective that best describes you as a reader today.

surprised	awesome	bad	better	connected
broken	comfortable	competent	confused	cautious
excited	experienced	excellent	gifted	respected
inferior	intelligent	miserable	passionate	

Explain why you chose this word.

C. Draw a picture that illustrates how you feel as a reader today.

Explain your drawing.

APPENDIX G
READING LOG PROTOCOL

For Week of September 14:

- Read for 30 minutes each night and record book title and pages read
- Select two questions and respond in complete sentences (at least one paragraph)
- Complete your homework at home

Question choices:

1. What did you enjoy most about your reading tonight?
2. What was something that did not make sense while reading?
3. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?
4. If you could be one character from your book, who would it be? Why?

For Week of September 21:

- Read for 30 minutes each night and record book title and pages read
- Select two questions and respond in complete sentences (at least one paragraph)
- Complete your homework at home

Question choices:

1. Pick one character and explain why you would/would not like to have him/her as a friend.
2. Describe and explain why you would/would not like to have lived in the time or place of the story.
3. From what you've read so far, make predictions about what will happen next and explain what in the text makes you think it will happen.
4. How do the character's actions affect other people in the story?

For Week of October 5:

- Read for 30 minutes each night and record book title and pages read
- Select two questions and respond in complete sentences (at least one paragraph)
- Complete your homework at home

Question choices:

1. Describe the **setting** of your book. Setting is where and when a story takes place.
2. Who is the most interesting character? Why?
3. What does the author do to keep you interested in the story? Explain.
4. What is one of the **conflicts** in the story? How do you think it will be **resolved**?

For Week of November 9:

- Read for 30 minutes each night and record book title and pages read
- Select two questions and respond in complete sentences (at least one paragraph)
- Complete your homework at home

Question Choices:

1. Describe one of the characters in the book using 2 **character traits**. Support your traits with evidence.
2. What is one of the **conflicts** in the book? How do you think it will be **resolved**?
3. Make a **prediction**. Support your prediction with evidence.

For Week of November 16:

- Read for 30 minutes each night and record book title and pages read
- Select two questions and respond in complete sentences (at least one paragraph)
- Complete your homework at home

Question Choices:

1. Describe and explain why you would/would not like to have lived in the time or place of the story.
2. Write a summary of your reading tonight.
3. How do the character's actions affect other people in the story?

For Week of November 30:

- Read for 30 minutes each night and record book title and pages read
- Select two questions and respond in complete sentences (at least one paragraph)
- Complete your homework at home

Question Choices:

1. What is one of the **themes** of your book? Explain.
2. What is the **setting** of your book? Explain.
3. Write a summary of your reading tonight.