

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF
PRACTICE RELATED TO READING PROGRAMS IN AN ACCOUNTABILITY-
BASED REFORM CONTEXT

by

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ABSTRACT

Teaching in an era of standards and accountability-based teaching has a direct impact on teachers and students. Narrative inquiry methodology was used to better examine the impact on the participant researcher and her students in the context of teaching adolescent literacy (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Montero & Washington, 2011; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). Over a three year period, adolescent literacy teaching methodology was examined through contrasting classroom contexts through the eyes of the teacher researcher and her students.

The following questions guided the inquiry: How has policy impacted me as a literacy teacher and the decisions I make, as well as the pressure I feel, with regards to reading programs? Which voices have guided, and continue to guide me, in the midst of an accountability-based landscape while building capacity to be an effective literacy leader? How do reading programs, in a time of accountability-based reform efforts, impact students? Implications from this study address the role of literacy leaders as active participants at school, community, and national levels, as well as suggestions for sustaining adolescent readers as they transition to high school.

Keywords: reading programs, standards and accountability, adolescent reading motivation, teachers as professionals

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Literacy can be a tool of oppression; it can also be a liberator for language minorities. It can be a bar to opportunity; or a means of opening a door to empowerment.

-Baker, 2011, p. 317

Situating the Research

Working toward meeting the literacy needs of a range of students is an on-going process. As a nation, various stakeholders have engaged in dialogues about what is necessary to narrow the achievement gap between different groups of students. Discussions revolve around ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop literacy skills that will position them well for success with the unique demands that this century presents. The intention of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was to address these concerns. However, a system set up to measure progress with standardized assessments has had unintended consequences on the lives of students and teachers in U.S. schools.

Educators and researchers have raised concerns about the emphasis on tests narrowing the focus of curriculum (Allington, 2012; Bracey, 2009; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Gallagher, 2009). Bracey (2009) stated, “We measure what we can and come to value what is measured over what is not. In doing so, we throw away most of education” (p. 4). A second trend that has emerged in the context of high-stakes testing is that many schools and districts respond by seeking quick fix programs, rather than

valuing the capacity of educators as professionals (Allington, 2012; Beers, 2009; Dennis, 2008; Dennis, 2009; Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Elmore, 2008; Riddle Buly & Valenia, 2002). Nonetheless, this ignores the concept that students need high quality teachers who are responsive to students' needs.

A third concern is related to the impact on adolescent motivation to read, as some educators have brought up concerns about programs influencing aliteracy among adolescents (Allington, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Gallagher, 2009; Layne, 2009). Finally, a fourth concern relates to the issue of equity. Many worry that rather than improving existing achievement gaps, the reform effort may actually be perpetuating the gap by creating a second-rate education for students targeted as needing additional support to meet up to expectations of standardized tests (Allington, 2012; Beers, 2009; Brint, 2006; Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Lipman, 2009; English & Steffy, 2001; Tovani, 2011).

Currently, the United States is at a cross roads as much national dialogue is focusing on the transition to Common Core State Standards (CCSS). While some educators believe the CCSS are an avenue to potential improvement or to reverse a trend toward an over-emphasis on basic literacy skills and move toward thoughtful literacy (Allington, 2012; Shanahan, 2011), others argue that the continual emphasis on accountability will remain detrimental to students and teachers (Krashen, 2011; Krashen & Ohanian, 2011; Ohanian, 2011).

Significance of the Research

Despite a large body of research related to literacy development, Allington (2012) explained, "[...] so much of what we have learned about teaching reading effectively—

especially to children who have difficulty—is being routinely ignored. [...] the research is being misrepresented” (p. 4). As such, there is a need for continual research to share the experiences that the current direction of educational reform is having on teachers and students, especially with the current opportunity that the shift toward the CCSS provides to re-conceptualize what we value and the type of instruction that can help us actualize the vision in classrooms across the country.

I started my teaching career with the backdrop of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the accountability measures as a result of the legislation were still in effect during my first six years of teaching. As such, I experienced teaching in three different districts and noticed how the school/district response to meeting the demands of NCLB greatly influenced the way in which experiences shaped the construction of my identity as a literacy leader.

The purpose of this study was to examine my personal journey as an educator to develop my philosophy of reading programs, with consideration of implications for the overall field of literacy professionals. Early in my teaching career I taught for a district that heavily relied on programs, rather than the capacity of teachers to closely observe students and make decisions based on demonstrated needs. I did not agree with some of the values inherent in the way the programs were set up and was relieved to leave the district for a school in the same community that closely aligned with my teaching philosophy and in which I once again felt valued as a professional.

Nonetheless, my students eventually transitioned into the same system that I left when they graduated from 8th grade and continued on to the high school. This inquiry focused on considering implications when my two drastic teaching contexts within the

same community collided with respects to my students. I also considered how student voices can influence practice. Teachers have sustained interactions with students, allowing them to observe the impact of instructional decisions on students. As such, they can provide another layer of considerations to the dialogue, moving from a theoretical or philosophical level to a blend of theory and practice to illuminate the big picture impact.

Research Methods and Questions

Utilizing narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Montero & Washington, 2011; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011), I examined a blend of my personal experiences and events that have shaped my decisions along the way, along with student insights. Considering multiple perspectives was vital in order to truly examine the multi-faceted layers of program implementation. One lens or the other alone would not paint as clear of a picture. I specifically examined the following questions:

1. How has policy impacted me as a literacy teacher and the decisions I make, as well as the pressure I feel, with regards to reading programs?
2. Which voices have guided, and continue to guide me, in the midst of an accountability-based landscape while building the capacity to be an effective literacy leader?
3. How do reading programs, in a time of accountability-based reform efforts, impact students?

By employing narrative inquiry methodology, I explored my journey as an educator attempting to provide instruction aligned with research in order to foster an environment where critical literacy and active engagement could flourish. Data from a

combination of narratives that I had written, as well as interviews with previous students informed my analysis.

This study was a means for me to closely examine my career as a professional passionate about adolescent literacy and concerned about the direction in which policy has moved the programs available in some schools and districts. Through the inquiry, I was able to consider implications for myself and other educators constructing their knowledge of who they are and who they want to become by looking back and looking forward while considering multiple perspectives. Aside from focusing on experiences from the teacher perspective, the research provided an avenue to hear student voices. When considering the overall effectiveness of policy and programs, it is essential to consider the whole child and the long-term effects, rather than merely analyzing trends in standardized test scores.

Organizational Overview

In the next chapter, I set the stage for the research by providing a review of the literature focusing on an accountability-based reform context and the impact on reading programs and students as readers. Then, in Chapter Three, I provide a rationale for narrative inquiry as a means to investigate the research questions, as well as an explanation of my process collecting and analyzing data. In Chapter Four, I present and analyze the research texts. Finally, in Chapter Five, I revisit the questions through the lens of the data before providing two types of recommendations – those related to implications for a vision of literacy leaders as professionals and those related to sustaining adolescent leaders, followed by recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE STAGE

An emphasis on accountability-based reform efforts has heavily influenced the context of education in the United States. Researchers and educators discuss perspectives and concerns related to providing students with quality literacy instruction. In this review of the literature, I provide an overview of a vision for adolescent literacy at the start of the 21st century before glimpsing back to historical attitudes and events that have led to the current context of education, specifically the impact of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Next, I outline areas that have caused concern regarding an emphasis on standardized test scores and the way it has been shaping education in the United States. I conclude by providing a glimpse into discussions about current shifts in education policy and reform.

A Vision for Adolescent Literacy

The types of jobs available in the U.S. economy are changing (Beers, 2009; Layne, 2009; Morrell, 2010; Nehring, 2009; Pink, 2009). Morrell (2010) stated, “The world needs independent, free-thinking, open-minded intellectuals who can come together to collect, process, and produce information that will help to solve the most challenging problems of our time” (p. 149). Yet, adolescents do not always enter the work force prepared for the literacy skills most highly valued (Kamil et al., 2008).

In a time of increased mechanization that is shifting the job market to more skilled positions, Beers (2009) outlined the requirements for the types of jobs that humans will continue to do:

- the ability to recognize, synthesize, and evaluate complex and emerging patterns and draw generalizations from those patterns;
- the ability to make on-the-spot predictions based on observed patterns;
- the ability to use the context of the situation for decisions; and,
- the ability to be flexible, adaptable, reactive, reflective, and speculative. (p. 6)

In addition, Harvey (2011) discusses the importance of creativity, thinking, and a sense of wonder. These skills closely align to what is required for critical literacy and active engagement while reading. Tovani (2011) stated, “Readers who are armed with thinking strategies are more independent because they know how to help themselves and are therefore more likely to build knowledge and think critically about the world around them” (p. 186).

Meanwhile, “basic” skills fall lower on the list of most important skills for the work force (Beers, 2009). Other researchers and educators have also been concerned with the emphasis on basic levels of proficiency versus fostering higher-order literacy and critical literacy skills (Allington, 2012; Layne, 2009; Nehring, 2009). Layne (2009) stated:

Those who can read and write well become powerful communicators; such people are the movers and shakers of society in many cases. While this has always been true, today more than ever, strong literacy skills are a critical survival asset [...] In

today's society, adults and school children whose reading abilities are deficient are treading water in a pool that has no shallow end. (p. 5)

Thus, thoughtful literacy is essential in order to thrive in the 21st century; however, in education, the clash between research and policy influenced implementations means that systems do not always support and facilitate what is most needed.

In order to examine the current context of education in the United States, it is fundamental to consider it through a lens of the history of the purpose of education and curriculum development in the United States as a foundation for present day pedagogy and practices (Nehring, 2009). In the early 20th century, John Dewey emphasized the need for systems fostering deep levels of thought leading to reflective democratic citizens, rather than transmission models (Shor, 2009). However, there has been a shift in the US educational system to have an ever-increasing amount of national control, which often undermines democratic schooling systems (Giroux, 2009).

Context of Education: No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, which Allington (2012) outlines, has had a strong presence on the educational landscape for a little over a decade. As an extension of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1966, NCLB was meant to narrow the achievement gap and improve instruction in high-poverty schools. As one layer to attempt to ensure that schools work toward the goal of narrowing the achievement gap, schools are expected to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or else they will face consequences meant to move the school in a positive direction toward

meeting different subgroups' needs. However, there are flaws in this line of reasoning.

Casanova (2010) stated:

It was necessary to find a way to close that gap by improving schools. But it was folly to assume that simply setting the same standards for all schools in the nation, requiring all students to take the same tests nationwide, publishing the results of those tests, and sanctioning schools that failed to measure up to federally imposed standards would improve the schools. (p. 82)

Aside from Casanova (2010), multiple education leaders have expressed concern over an ever-increasing emphasis on testing and scores. Many of the arguments link directly to what Ravitch (2010) refers to as the original intents of reforms being “hijacked” over time, turning the standards movement turning into a testing movement. Shortly after the passage of NCLB, Elmore (2008) stated, “Thus the federal government is now accelerating the worst trend of the current accountability movement: that performance-based accountability has come to mean testing, and testing alone” (p. 203). Giroux (2009) agreed, stating, “[...] educational reform has become synonymous with turning schools into testing centers” (p. 441). Nehring (2009) talked about an unfortunate shift that has manifested in education as a result the era of accountability stating, “The question is not, how do we improve the learning that is measured by these tests, but how do we improve the test scores” (p. 27). Bracey (2009) discussed how the shift impacts democracy stating, “When teachers are forced, against their better judgment, to focus on teaching test content to the exclusion of almost everything else, I can only conclude that the high-stakes testing movement nourishes totalitarian regimes” (p. 2). Thus, many

leaders in the field are voicing concerns about the direction of the country with relation to education.

In a system that places such value on testing, test scores highly impact teachers and students; unfortunately, the scores' reliability is questioned. McGill-Franzen and Allington (2006) outline four sources of contamination: summer reading loss, retention, test preparation, and testing accommodations. Allington (2000) also talks about the dangers of raising scores without improving teaching or school-wide effectiveness, aspects that when in place, improve student learning. Elmore (2008) stated, "[...] relying only on standardized tests simply dodges the complicated questions of what tests actually measure and of how schools and students react when tests are the sole yardstick of performance" (p. 203). Thus, there are multiple concerns with misuse of standardized test data, rather than viewing it as one data source to use in combination with others.

Title I, including Reading First, focused on supporting growth in communities with high levels of poverty. Unfortunately, as Allington (2012) describes, "One huge problem with the several mandated corrective actions is the almost complete lack of research supported for any of the options" (25). Elmore (2008) corroborates the concept of the lack of knowledge behind policies intended to enact positive change and explains that flaws in current accountability systems will hinder their abilities to achieve what they are intended to. Allington (2012) points out the irony of the situation as he states, "It seems odd, given the emphasis on using 'research-based' interventions in NCLB, that so many mandates are offered that have so little evidence of success in improving achievement" (p. 25). Nonetheless, NCLB is not the first instance of mandates that are not supported, as two previous mandates – Comprehensive School Reform and

Development Act (CSRDA) in 1990 and the Reading Excellence Act (REA) in 1998 were similar (Allington, 2012). Bracey (2009) also explains that the current “descent into hell” with relation to U.S. education has historical roots as it was heavily influenced by the political context during the Cold War (p. 9).

In addition, even though Reading First increased the amount of time that participating schools spent on “reading,” students spend most of the 90-120 minutes per day doing activities other than actual reading, such as filling out worksheets (Allington, 2012), a trend that is similar to remediation in general (English & Steffy, 2001). A similar trend of time spent reading authentically versus completing worksheets and test preparation in older grades is also apparent. Allington (2012) stated, “Given that no research supports either workbook nor test preparation activity as a way to improve reading proficiency, it troubles me enormously that so many adolescents are wasting their time” (p. 66). However, the lack of time dedicated to actually reading in school has been an issue since before NCLB (Allington, 1977).

It is now apparent that NCLB has impacted school reading programs, yet it has not necessarily been positive (Allington, 2012). Allington (2012) states, “[...] so much of what we have learned about teaching reading effectively—especially to children who have difficulty—is being routinely ignored. [...] the research is being misrepresented” (p. 4). As such, NCLB and Reading First have been viewed as failures with regards to enacting high levels of reading achievement, as well as closing the achievement gap (Allington, 2012; Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011), and English and Steffy (2001) viewed the concept of high-stakes testing as a means for improving quality as misguided. As a result, Congress is no longer funding the Reading First initiative (Allington, 2012).

NCLB has had many unintended consequences (Casanova, 2010). Teacher capacity has a strong impact on student achievement; however, this is undermined by the large amount of inexperienced teachers working with the highest need populations (Pappano, 2010), as well as the reliance on programs versus capacity (Allington, 2012). In addition, the disconnect between research and practice relates back to the concept of the purpose of education in a democratic society. Morrell (2010) noted, “We must ask ourselves why we have fallen behind and what we need to do to ensure that our students are ready for their futures as competent professionals and engaged citizens” (p. 146). Morrell (2010) also mentioned that discussions related to education reform often address the need for improved achievement linked to the future of our nation; yet, federal funding expresses a value on defense vs. education.

Even more discouraging is the idea that the history of working toward this goal actually started before NCLB with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1966, and studies have shown that it *is* possible for all children of various backgrounds, with few exceptions, to learn to read and it just is not happening (Allington, 2012). In their report, *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, Kamil et al. (2008) provide five suggestions for teachers with a corresponding level noting the strength of evidence according to the base of research the authors considered:

1. Provide explicit vocabulary instruction. (Strong)
2. Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction. (Strong)
3. Provide opportunities for extended discussions of text meaning and interpretation. (Moderate)
4. Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning. (Moderate)

5. Make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists. (Strong) (p. 7)

Additional studies have shown types of classroom strategies that increase reading motivation, including: literature circles, sustained silent reading time, choice in literacy center intervention books, discussions about books, book talks, peer recommendations, modeling strategies, teacher read-alouds, and teacher enthusiasm toward books and reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004; Pitcher et al., 2007; Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010; Rose, 2011).

Many of these strategies foster social aspects, which Smith and Wilhelm (2002) explained spark motivation. Teachers play an active role in fostering an environment that facilitates discussion, such as having access to thought-provoking books and modeling good discussions (Allington, 2007a; Shanklin, 2010). Gallo (2010) emphasizes the importance of teachers not only talking about good books but also providing access to books and time to read in class. In addition, Gallo (2010) recognizes the importance of educators being aware of the body of literature available and mindful of how different literature will appear to individual students, rather than educators only sticking to their personal favorite genres. In addition, by having discussions revolving around genuine, critical questions, inquiry can be a powerful motivator (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm & Smith, 2007).

What Experts Have Learned from Current Reform Efforts

Nehring (2009) stated, “We ought to regularly ask, does this practice or that policy or this curriculum or that school reform model really enhance instructional practice, or does it just look nice from afar?” (p. 4). Pappano (2010) expressed the need

to consider the level of actual success in implementation, instead of accepting a design solely because “smart people have come up with a terrific research-based school design” (p. 37). This is often the case with what Nehring (2009) calls the view from the top, “the tendency to impose plans that look great from above but that make little sense at the ground level” (p. 54). In the case of NCLB, many components just look nice from afar or do not make sense at the ground level because there are many issues inherent in the policies that prevent the realization of the noble intent of narrowing the achievement gap. While examining the literature, four themes emerged related to accountability-based reform concerns: a narrow focus of education, reliance on quick-fix programs, environments that lead to adolescent aliteracy, and issues of equity. Following are explanations of each.

Narrowing the Focus – What Is Tested vs. What Is Valued

Students may pass the tests, but they're being robbed of perhaps the only opportunity they may ever have of building that wide knowledge base that is foundational if they are able to develop into critical readers of the world.

-Gallagher (2009), p. 35

Despite the good intentions of the legislation, NCLB has served to narrow the curriculum. Often in a high-stakes environment, what is tested is taught (Beers, 2009; Meyer, 2011; Newkirk, 2009). As Darder et al. (2009) stated, “Accountability measures, standardized curriculum, and instrumentalized teaching approaches have all worked to strip education of its democratic ideals and transformative potential” (p. 361). English and Steffy (2001) advocate for standards and for teachers to have a close alignment to tests in order to provide all students with a fair chance to do well on assessments;

however, they believe school reform should focus on teaching and learning, rather than assessment. In an effort to ensure that all students receive a quality education, there was a shift toward standards.

Nonetheless, others also express concerns with implementations linked to standards-based reform (Gallagher, 2009; McNeil, 2009; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002). Riddle Buly and Valencia (2002) stated, “[...] sometimes it can be oversimplified and inadvertently lead to inappropriate instruction. More specifically, aligning instruction with state assessments may help teachers focus on what is tested [...] but it will not address the skills and strategies that underlie such competence” (p. 234). McNeil (2009) explained the unintended negative impact of standards-based reform and the testing that goes along with it, “Standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned [...] over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students” (p. 384). Thus, the reform effort often undermines the success of the very students it intends to support.

Riddle Buly and Valencia (2002) emphasize the need to teach students, rather than solely focusing on teaching standards. Meyer (2011) also provides a caution against such decision making:

When young adolescents’ learning is defined by results on a standards-based test, education has been defined by what the test measures. If poetry isn’t measured, or science, or social studies, or joy, then these elements drop off the radar, no longer deemed important facets of education, where ‘important’ means influential upon a school’s ratings and even survival. (p. 22)

Compounding the overemphasis on standardized test scores is that the current assessments are more closely aligned to the skills required for previous generations (Beers, 2009). Allington (2007a) stated, “[...] if we continue to define literacy accomplishments as primarily those proficiencies we can sometimes measure (or estimate) from standardized reading achievement tests, we will be selling our students and our nation short” (p. 287). Nehring (2009) cautioned against reducing learning to scores, which “narrows the focus of education” (p. 27).

Much of literacy instruction and assessments do not place a high enough value on highly engaged readers responding thoughtfully to texts, in contrast to educational leaders and researchers who recognize the importance (i.e. Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Beers, 2009; Fink, 2006; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Tatum, 2009). Beers (2009) stated, “Our most threatening dragons are the educational policies and classroom practices that reduce our understanding of what it means to live a literate life to a score on a bubbled-in exam” (p. 7). Bracey (2009) explains that it is difficult to assess much of what is most highly valued, and as a result, “We measure what we can and come to value what is measured over what is not. In doing so, we throw away most of education” (p. 4).

Furthermore, some programs lead to students successfully meeting State reading proficiency standards, yet they are not engaged readers (Allington, 2012; Beers, 2009; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). Applegate and Applegate (2010) stated:

The widespread use of programs that encourage children to recall but not think about what they read may succeed in producing sizeable numbers of children who appear technically proficient in reading. But if the children who pass through these programs are not engaged in thoughtful response to what they read, we run

the risk of producing huge numbers of children who see no use for reading in their lives. That illusion of educational success may come at a very high price indeed.

(p. 233)

Allington (2012) added to the conversation, stating:

“[...] if we focus children’s attention almost exclusively on remembering after reading, I worry that they will confuse recall with understanding. And if we fail to provide students with models and demonstrations of thoughtful literacy and lessons on how to develop those proficiencies, I fear that we will continue to develop students who don’t even know that thoughtful literacy is the reason for reading. (p. 129)

As such, it is vital to make what we value about reading transparent to students in our words and practice. Researchers advocate for students to have access to legitimate curriculum that will have the power to transform their lives, rather than demeaning skill-based drills (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Tatum, 2009). Beers (2009) noted:

These high-stakes assessments come with too many penalties, are focused on discreet skills, often lead to admonitions to just ‘fix’ the kids who are ‘hurting the scores,’ and rarely lead to a passion for *learning*. We have embraced practices that encourage students—*children*—to believe that the reason to read about Charlotte and Wilbur, the reason to walk over that bridge into Terabithia, the reason to watch the life of a boy who began as a kite runner, or to stand next to Cassie Logan or Kenny Watson or Scout or Romeo and Juliet is to be able to answer a ten-item multiple-choice test on a computer. (p. 7)

Along the same line of thought, researchers have expressed cautions with technology usage that does not empower students (Beers, 2009; Brint, 2006). Beers (2009) remarked about one classroom set up for intervention, “I had walked into a classroom that, though filled with technology, most assuredly was not preparing students for success in the global economy of the 21st century” (p. 3). Brint (2006) explained, “Many teachers continue to use computers for unimaginative drill work” (p. 273). Thus, programs and interventions in place to help narrow the achievement gap can actually serve to provide obstacles to students accessing legitimate curriculum.

Yet, this goes against the aim of democratic schooling. Gillespie (2010) stated his classroom vision, in contrast to the emphasis on testing, “I didn’t want to do test prep; rather, I wanted to teach literary criticism in a way that would benefit my students in their college careers, in their workplace occupations, and in their lives as readers and citizens” (p. 2). Beers and Probst (2011) emphasize the need for this line of thought:

At a time when our own lives are bumping up against those of people across the globe, at a time when the world is not only flattened, but also smaller, at a time when, more than ever, we want students considering situations from another point of view, experiencing things they have never before experienced, developing empathy, developing the stamina to read critically texts longer than a few clicks of the computer screen, at a time when we want students to think for themselves, then we must give them texts that provide characters worth empathizing with, ideas worth wondering about, settings worth traveling to, and themes worth exploring. When we do that, then we are helping prepare them for the demands of the 21st century. (p. 5)

Others corroborate the need to prepare students in order to be productive citizens and cautions about the adverse impact that undermining creativity will have as students navigate the demands of an ever-changing society (Bracey, 2009; Gibboney, 2009; Zimmerman, 2011). Nonetheless, Allington (2012) noted that evaluations of literacy interventions focus on basic literacy, rather than thoughtful literacy, perpetuating a sense of effectiveness with a level of skill that is not ideal.

Furthermore, Allington (2012) described why the problem is exacerbated, “[...] in far too many states paraprofessionals or teachers with no graduate training in reading disabilities provided the extra lessons. In far too many schools paraprofessionals simply monitored struggling readers while they worked on some form of computer-assisted reading lessons” (p. 18). Both of these trends go against what research suggests as being effective (Allington, 2012).

Applegate and Applegate (2010) talk about inclinations to think deeply, mentioning, “Many of these children have simply not yet encountered a situation that demands that they do the same type of thinking about what they read” (p. 228). However, in their study to start exploring a potential relationship, they found that inclination to respond thoughtfully and motivation appear to be related. Applegate and Applegate (2010) state, “[...] It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a disturbingly large number of elementary school children have little use for reading and a limited inclination to think deeply about what they read” (p. 231).

Morrell (2010) has strong convictions about the dire need to foster thinking vs. basic skills, stating, “Critical literacy is a matter of life and death. Students, families, communities, and neighborhoods simply cannot survive in the 21st century without

raising literacy rates” (p. 147). Morrell (2010) also advocated for what we should value, stating, “We need to expand the language of effectiveness to mean more than test results only” (p. 148). In his emphasis for the need to demand a value for critical literacy, Morrell (2010) noted, “Literacy has to be empowering, or else what is the point of demanding it?” (p. 149).

Zimmerman (2011) reflects on the negative impact of too much testing, as well as testing that does not encourage a high level of thought and states a call for action:

Somehow, in our effort to make sure that no child is left behind (or that no child is left untested!) we have forgotten that we need to teach children to be thinkers and problem solvers [...] We need to find ways to bring intellectual rigor and expansiveness to the classroom so young people will be able to deal with and adapt to the changes they will, no doubt, face--and so that their lives can be as rich and productive as possible. (p. 36)

Bracey (2009) corroborates, stating, “Lately, it’s all dreariness and fearmongering about ‘achievement,’ achievement narrowly defined by test scores. Get it through your head now: In the long run, test scores don’t count” (p. 3). Clearly educational leaders have plenty to say about what is not beneficial. As such, there is a need for frequent, ongoing dialogue about what does count and how practice can portray those values on a daily basis.

According to Bracey (2009), one aspect that should be receiving a high level of emphasis is creativity, yet, “NCLB depresses creativity both in kids and teachers” (p. 5). Thus, educators at all levels must reflect on the purpose of education and how current

policies are either working toward or detracting from those aims, as well as considering what really “counts” in the long run for students.

Quick Fix Programs vs. the Capacity of Educators

The consequences of not meeting AYP have led many people to look for quick fixes or lose sight of individual student needs (Allington, 2012; Beers, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2010; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002; Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004). Elmore (2008) stated, “[...] the increased pressure of test-based accountability, without substantial investments in capacity, is likely to aggravate the existing inequalities between low-performing and high-performing schools and students” (p. 207). Often, school leaders turn to commercially prepared, scripted programs that claim to be “proven” or “research based” to meet student needs (Allington, 2012; Dennis, 2008; Dennis, 2009; Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002).

Yet, research does not support that they do indeed meet the varied needs of students and the research purporting that the programs work are often funded or provided by the programs’ companies (Allington, 2012; Dennis, 2008; Dennis, 2009; Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002). Allington (2012) mentioned, “There is a long-standing federal enthusiasm for packaged reading reform. Unfortunately, we also have 50 years of research showing that packaged reforms simply do not seem reliable in improving student achievement” (p. 17). The What Works Clearinghouse analyzed research on 150 reading programs, and only deemed Reading Recovery as having “strong evidence” of increasing reading achievement, while none of the scripted programs that tout capabilities to meet the needs of students and “fix” schools problems received that categorization (Allington, 2012). As such, there is a strong disconnect between products

that claim to be “research-based” and what the current body of quality research actually indicates (Allington, 2012).

Programs have limitations with regards to being able to meet the range of adolescents’ literacy needs. In relation to comprehension strategy instruction, Tovani (2011) noted:

Much of the criticism our work drew came from outsiders who tried to translate strategy instruction into a program or a formula. [...] We knew no two readers were alike and therefore no single solution, technique, or strategy could meet the needs of all students. Teaching readers *how* to comprehend, versus *what* to comprehend is multifaceted. (p. 179)

Thus, when considering criticism, it is vital to consider whether the impetus of the criticism even aligns with how the advocates propose the ideas or if they are trying to over-simplify.

Allington (2012) also explained that adolescent literacy needs cannot be reduced to a single program:

As struggling readers progress through school, the basis of their reading difficulties varies even more widely. Because any group of tenth-grade struggling readers will present a variety of difficulties, there is no such thing as a ‘scientific’ or ‘proven’ one-size-fits-all program or package. [...] Older students have no time to waste on lessons they do not need. [...] The middle and high school market for quick-fix solutions is growing every day. But the bottom line is that no product

will be appropriate for all struggling readers and no product can overcome inexpert teaching. (p. 202)

In addition, Allington (2012) addressed two issues with implementing one commercial program “with fidelity” to meet the needs of all students in a school that NCLB designers ignored as they created the legislation – research did not support core or supplementary programs to have the impact intended through the legislation (aside from Reading Recovery), and the programs have better results when knowledgeable teachers adapt according to their students’ needs. Curricular decisions should be mindful, rather than superficial (MacGillivray, Lassiter Ardell, Saucedo Curwen, & Palma, 2004; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002).

However, the current emphasis on pre-packaged programs undermines teachers’ ability to be mindful practitioners. Because the law outlined that Title I services needed to be “supplemental,” the services were frequently provided in pullout settings, leading to fragmentation of extra support (Allington, 2012). Pull out support programs often have commercially prepared intervention programs with relatively static grouping. However, these programs fail to recognize students who are targeted for interventions or who struggle to read in the mainstream do not necessarily have the same needs (Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002; Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004).

Valencia and Riddle Buly (2004) stated, “Simply knowing which children have failed state tests is a bit like knowing that you have a fever when you are feeling ill but having no idea of the cause or cure” (p. 520). Based on their study of 108 fifth graders who scored below standard on their 4th grade state reading assessments, Valencia and Riddle Buly (2004) identified different profiles of students that recognize strengths and

weaknesses in reading: Cluster 1-Automatic Word Callers who decode words quickly, but do not tend to meaning; Cluster 2-Struggling Word Callers who struggle with meaning and word identification; Cluster 3-Word Stumblers who have difficulty with identification but strong comprehension, Cluster 4-Slow Comprehenders are relatively strong decoders and comprehenders that may not always be automatic with multisyllabic words; Cluster 5-Slow Word Callers are similar to Cluster 1 except they read at a slow, rather than a fluent, rate; and Cluster 6-Disabled Readers who experience “severe difficulty in all three areas—word identification, meaning, and fluency” (p. 527).

Another cause for concern with intervention programs is the frequency of decisions about student placements resulting from single measures, rather than multiple indicators (Dennis, 2008; Dennis, 2009; Elmore, 2008; McNeil, 2009; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002). Dennis (2008) stated:

Simply put, [high-stakes assessments] place students in categories ranging from advanced to below basic. In other words, they either know how to read or they don't. These categories provide teachers with little specific information regarding the individual needs of students, and yet many schools determine placement in reading classes based solely on these scores. (p. 578)

Tests scores isolation also fail to distinguish between other factors such as level of motivation and effort during the assessment.

Often schools determine whether or not students will receive support in pull out settings based on standardized testing; however, Allington (2012) addresses why this is worrisome:

Every major research and measurement organization, as well as the National Research Council, has opposed using standardized test data in making decisions about an individual student's achievement [...] But NCLB mandates standardized testing to identify children for supplemental services, and so on. The achievement tests available today simply cannot provide the sort of information districts need to make decisions about students. (p. 26)

Thus, these mandates are one more example of how the reform looks good from afar but has unintended consequences by instilling mandates that are counter to what literacy leaders know is vital.

In addition, just because students meet minimum proficiency expectations on state reading assessments does not mean that they do not need additional support (Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004; Pitcher et al., 2010). Valencia & Riddle Buly (2004) stated:

[...] even if Martin were to get the additional two points needed to pass the state test, he would still have a significant problem with rate and some difficulty with automatic decoding of multisyllabic words, both of which would hamper his future reading success. (p. 526)

However, a system that focuses on test results often overlook this distinction when providing services and support for students. As such, the over-reliance on test scores as the ultimate measure can screen kids who do need support out of interventions.

Allington (2007b) raised one detriment of seeing pull-out instruction as *the* support for at-risk students:

[...] school districts have come to think of intervention for struggling readers as something accomplished in a session outside the classroom, a session one period long, a session taught by someone other than Tyrone's classroom teacher. School districts have adopted this model, I believe, because federal education policy has long supported such designs. (p. 7)

As a result, while students may receive interventions with texts that are appropriate, the majority of the day they interact with texts that are not accessible, an aspect that needs to shift to systems considering day-long interventions with appropriate texts linked to grade-level content (Allington, 2007b).

Instead of focusing on programs that will solve schools' "problems," researchers advocate for increasing teachers' capacity, resulting in better teaching and learning all day long (Allington, 2000; Allington, 2002; Allington, 2012; Dennis, 2008; Dennis, 2009; Elmore, 2008; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Kamil et al., 2008; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Nehring, 2009; Newkirk, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2010; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002). There is also a need for allowing teachers to make decisions based on their students' needs (Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Newkirk, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2010; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002). It is essential that systems foster habits of inquiry and reflection (Nehring, 2009). Yet, a shift toward scripted programs "diminishes the need for professional development and normalizes the emergency (un)credentialed teacher" (MacGillivray et al., 2004, 143) and stifles teachers' abilities to differentiate among students and their needs (Demko & Hedrick, 2010). Demko and Hedrick (2010) worry about the lack of choice in scripted instruction, which negatively impacts student motivation.

In order to best serve the needs of students who struggle to read, teachers and reading specialists must work together to closely analyze student strengths and needs and provide appropriate support, rather than relying on a one-size fits all instructional model (Allington, 2012; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002; Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004). In addition to understanding reading assessments, teachers must also be knowledgeable about reading processes and instruction (Allington, 2012; Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004).

Valencia and Riddle Buly (2004) provide instructional suggestions for each profile, yet lumping all students identified as needing additional support into one set group does not often recognize the unique needs of each individual student or profile of students. Some programs inaccurately assume what struggling readers need, such as focusing on decoding; yet, Valencia and Riddle Buly (2004) state, “[...] we cannot assume that students who score at the lowest level on the test need decoding instruction” (p. 527) and “[Cluster 6] is the smallest group (9%), yet, ironically, this is the profile that most likely comes to mind when we think of children who fail state reading tests” (p. 527). In addition, Valencia and Riddle Buly (2004) note:

[...] placing all struggling students in a phonics or word identification program would be inappropriate for nearly 58% of the students in this sample who had adequate or strong word identification skills. In a similar manner, an instructional approach that did not address fluency and building reading stamina for longer more complex text or that did not provide sufficient reading material at a range of levels would miss almost 70% of the students who demonstrated difficulty with fluency. (p. 528)

Even for the students who do fall into the Disabled Readers profile, it is about more than capabilities. Teachers also have to consider engagement (Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004).

Nonetheless, as a result of the push for scripted programs, teachers have been ever-increasingly treated as technicians, expected to embrace scripted programs, rather than playing an active role as professionals (Allington, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Brint, 2006; Darder et al., 2009; Dennis, 2008; Dennis, 2009; Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Giroux, 2009; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002). Giroux (2009) states, “[...] the deskilling of teachers appears to go hand in hand with the increasing adoption of management-type pedagogies” (p. 442). In addition, teachers who resist the mandated curriculum often feel as if those mandating the curriculum view them as putting children at risk (Legard Larson & Kalmbach Phillips, 2005). Even though NCLB values teacher capacity by emphasizing highly-qualified teachers (Brint, 2006), other related policies, such as a reliance on programs without flexibility, counteract this effort.

Aside from questions of whether or not the programs match students’ literacy needs, there are also concerns for the negative impact that scripted programs have on creativity. Bracey (2009) states, “[...] Of course, if scripted teaching becomes more prevalent this characteristic [giving own perspectives/opinions and asking questions] of American students could disappear. And, if scripted teaching does spread, we are in worse trouble” (p. 7). Bracey (2009) continues to discuss why it is essential to preserve creativity, “It is no accident that ‘creativity’ tops my list of qualities. It is what everybody talks about in connection with America and Americans” (p. 7). Thus, for many practitioners in the classroom, there is a clash between what they value and what they are mandated to do based on district or school mandates influenced by policy.

Nehring (2009) addresses teachers' dilemma with NCLB mandates, as well as suggested action, stating:

Talk about a moral dilemma! How do you do what you know is right in your classroom when all around you the system's gears demand that you comply with bad educational practice or get shredded to pieces. [...] And yet, there is always something you can do. [...] Therefore, you need to be in the habit of asking, what do my students need to know for the test, and how can I incorporate that information into lessons grounded in sound pedagogy? (pp. 86-87)

Yet, this is increasingly difficult in contexts where schools mandate that teachers utilize scripted programs "with fidelity," in rigid manners.

MacGillivray et al. (2004) explains, "Teachers seem to be caught between exerting their professional knowledge and a compelling need to be team players—because of peer, supervisor, and/or parent pressure—by carrying out the district's mandate to the letter" (p. 137). In addition, teachers and student teachers often notice a clash between coursework, beliefs, and practice (Legard Larson & Kalmbach Phillips, 2005; Lipman, 2009). Legard Larson and Kalmbach Phillips (2005) notes, "The authoritative discourse of the scripted program not only interfered, dodged, and collided with the university's discourse of comprehensive reading instruction, but also conflicted with Claire's concept of reading instruction" (p. 317). Thus, teachers are in a constant turmoil trying to best meet student needs within a system that does not necessarily facilitate being able to use their professional judgment.

Zimmerman (2011) advocates for teachers applying the medical maxim, "First, do no harm" when considering curriculum, stating, "Do nothing that makes a child feel

ignorant or inferior; nothing that bores children so they turn off to learning; nothing that underestimates their gifts and potential; nothing that values a test score over a child's imagination" (p. 37). When reflecting on the power of teachers to change lives, Keene reflected on the challenges that teachers face in order to teach in a way that is best for their students:

Teachers are the key and in this era we are called upon to make courageous decisions in classrooms--even decisions that defy conventional wisdom and existing policy. Increasingly good teaching becomes an act of civil disobedience--at least some of the time. Yet isn't that the way that true change happened in the world? (in Zimmerman, 2011, p. 37)

Thus, teachers have a challenge to decide what they are willing to do in order to advocate for their students and act on their behalf.

Adolescent Aliteracy vs. Motivation

Aside from student reading abilities, teachers must also consider engagement. Trends in adolescent literacy demonstrate a decline in motivation during middle school and high school (Newkirk, 2009; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005; Wells, 1996). Zimmerman (2011) states:

The only way we are going to address our reading problem in the U.S. is by making reading a joyful experience for children. If we teach our children to love reading, they will do it on their own. If we don't, they won't. It's that simple. (p. 43)

Gallagher (2009) raised concerns that currently many schools are not creating the conditions for students to love reading, stating, “[...] many of the reading practices found in today’s classrooms are actually contributing to the death of reading. In an earnest attempt to instill reading, teachers and administrators push practices that kill many students’ last chance to develop into lifelong readers” (p. 2).

Gallagher (2009) outlines four factors that contribute to readicide in schools:

- “Schools value the development of test-takers more than they value the development of readers
- Schools are limiting authentic reading experiences
- Teachers are overteaching books
- Teachers are underteaching books” (p. 5).

Other researchers have talked about the issue of aliteracy in the United States, students who are able to read but choose not to or have an aversion to it (Allington, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Gallagher, 2009; Layne, 2009). Layne (2009) expressed that it is essential to focus on aliterate and disengaged readers and stated, “I am all for teaching reading skills because without skills no one can read; however, if research is being given careful consideration, how are we missing the fact that our aliteracy rate has *surpassed* our illiteracy rate?” (p. 8). It is essential to remember the big picture of students’ lives, not just immediate cut scores.

Nehring (2009) stated, “Better to create and assess the value of curriculum by its ability to meaningfully engage students than by adult needs for order and control” (p. 77). However, many core programs, especially those that are scripted and discourage

flexibility to adapt to student needs, do not meaningfully engage students. Pitcher et al. (2007) explained contexts leading to nonreaders and alliterate adolescents, “[...] students judge reading and literacy activities to be unrewarding, too difficult or not worth their effort because they are peripheral to their interests and needs” (p. 379). As such, programs do not only impact struggling readers but can also get in the way of capable readers becoming life-long readers if teachers are not able to be responsive to individuals as readers.

According to Davila and Patrick (2010) adults often have a high level of control over the texts that children read, and they encourage adults to consider implications of reading research in relation to “authorized reading” and “actual reading” (p. 199). Allowing adolescents to have choice in their reading materials increases motivation, which may in turn improve their reading (Allington, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rose, 2011; Tatum, 2009). Although adolescents do not have to choose everything they read, it is important that they have opportunities to self-select texts (Rose, 2011).

In addition, teachers need to closely consider what they view as “reading” (Newkirk, 2009; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm & Smith, 2007). This is even more pronounced with the increase of 21st century literacies (Newkirk, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Wilhelm & Smith, 2007). The disconnect between what schools value as reading and writing and literacies outside of schools often leads to avid readers and writers outside of school not recognizing themselves as such (Pitcher et al., 2007).

There is a need to incorporate comprehension strategies and encourage deep thinking (Harvey, 2011; Tovani, 2011; Zimmerman, 2011). Harvey (2011) stated:

Every time we give kids a list of those literal end-of-text comprehension questions, we are implicitly telling them their thinking doesn't matter. [...] These literal questions narrow kids' thinking channels rather than expand them. They limit imagination and curiosity rather than expand them. They limit imagination and curiosity rather than driving it. So sadly, many kids quit asking on their own. (p. 119)

Furthermore, Harvey (2011) advocates, "For learning to flourish, we must foster a culture of thinking where our kids are continually interacting with the text, the teacher, and each other" (p. 125).

Educators have emphasized the need to incorporate diverse literature in the classroom, complemented by rich discussions (Christensen, 2011; Gillespie, 2010; Harvey, 2011; Jago, 2011; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Tatum, 2009; Tovani, 2011; Wilhelm & Novak, 2011); however, this is stifled by teachers who have to use scripted programs without flexibility to supplement or who are mandated to not have authentic discussions that stray from the script. Despite the pressure for many teachers to utilize scripted instruction, Applegate and Applegate (2010) also talked about another scenario, "We have found that many teachers who enjoy some measure of curricular freedom seize the moment and opt for thoughtful literacy instruction in their classrooms" (p. 232).

Many researchers advocate for the dire need to allow adolescents opportunities to interact with meaningful texts that capture their interest (Fink, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Tatum, 2009). Tatum (2009) explained, "Neither effective reading strategies nor literacy reform will close the reading achievement gap or life outcome gap unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum and educators know how to mediate

such texts” (p. xii). Thus, teachers’ understandings of texts, of kids, and of literacy needs are at the core of effective support.

Issues of Equity – No Child Left Behind or Perpetuating the Gap?

How many other parents face circumstances in which their child would benefit from a different educational setting and yet are unable, through lack of money or know-how, to make a change? The answer: millions. [...] There is something fundamentally unfair about the fact that I can do this for my daughter and so many others cannot, especially in the richest country in the world, and especially in a democracy. (Nehring, 2009, p. 6)

Though NCLB aimed toward equity, some question its true intent, stating it was really set up as a means to attack public education in order to privatize it (Bracey, 2009; Gibboney, 2009). Wilhelm and Novak (2011) refer to it as “inhumane and antidemocratic” (p. 188). Bracey (2009) explains why NCLB was not equipped to close the achievement gap, “[...] there is nothing in the entire research literature to suggest a program like NCLB would reduce or eliminate that gap. NCLB simply says ‘do it’” (p. 105). Bracey (2009) also stated, “NCLB uses the phrase ‘scientifically based research’ 111 times in its 1,100 pages, but there is no research whatsoever that undergirds the law’s approach to school reform. If anything the research argues *against* NCLB” (p. 110).

Tovani (2011) stated, “Access to meaning is at the heart of equity. Teachers have the potential to be ‘gatekeepers, gate-closers, or gate-openers’” (p. 191). Yet, researchers are concerned with equity issues related to the types of programs that schools, including Title I schools, often use, which is influenced by federal legislation (Allington, 2012; Beers, 2009; Demko & Hedrick, 2010; Tovani, 2011). Lipman (2009) stated, “Schools in low-income neighborhoods of color are the least in charge of their own destiny” (p. 370).

Allington (2012) stated, “The evidence indicates that U.S. schools currently work better for certain children than for others. In order to fulfill the promise of public education, schools must work for all children—regardless of gender, race, or which parents the children got” (p. 11). Allington (2012) questions the likelihood of students from low-income families becoming productive citizens given our current educational system that often fails to teach students living in poverty to read well.

In addition, Allington (2012) explained that even though the Title I services were meant to be supplemental, the instruction often fully or partially replaced mainstream classroom reading lessons. As a result, Allington (2012) stated, “The Title I legislation created the now-widespread ‘second system’ of education” (p. 18). Tovani (2011) explained the impact, “Some kids go all through school never getting the chance to read great works because someone along the way decided they didn’t need it or couldn’t do it” (p. 187). Jago (2011) corroborated by stating, “Children are shortchanged when their teachers shy away from difficult texts” (p. 66). Harvey agrees with Tovani, stating, “Kids who pass the test get text they can sink their teeth into. Kids who don’t get pablum. And then we blame them for not growing as readers” (in Tovani, 2011, p. 187). English and Steffy (2001) explain that tracking students, often those who are poor or minorities, leads to a “vicious cycle in which lower expectations produce lower test results” (p. 98). Brint (2006) concurred and added that tracking leads to demoralization more than learning, and Lipman (2009) discussed the impact of tracking to further “ideologies of deficient ‘others’” (p. 369).

A second system of education for language learners can be devastating, as they need to have access to subject matter, rather than waiting until they have reached a

certain proficiency in English and falling behind in school subjects in the meantime (Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004). In addition, others are concerned about scripted instruction that is not responsive to language learners' needs (MacGillivray et al., 2004).

After observing one intervention class, Beers (2009) wondered, "[...] how long students had to do that before they went back to other classes, other classes where the experiences were rich and varied and were more about curiosity than correctness" (p. 3). The principal responded that some students worked on the computer based modules all day and would not return to mainstream classrooms until they demonstrated that they could do grade-level work. Beers (2009) noted that the majority of students were minority males and students from low SES backgrounds.

Appalled by what she noticed at the school visit, as well as in a report by Riel and Becker (2000), Beers (2009) noted:

I worry that this digital divide reflects a belief that poorer students cannot handle or grasp higher-level thinking but must be drilled in basic skills. This mindset encourages unequal schooling of this nation's children, and sustains a segregation every bit as intolerable as segregation based on color. This segregation of intellectual rigor undermines the democracy of this country by quietly suggesting that some deserve better than others. (p. 4)

Beers (2009) also explained how a columnist, Seligman (2005), expressed a belief that low socio-economic status equates to a lower level of cognitive ability. Seligman (2005), who expressed his opinion that Columbia University's Teachers College and Harvard's efforts to improve the achievement gap are futile, noted, "Everyone hits a brick wall at some point. [...] the fact remains that disadvantaged students hit the wall earlier and learn

less.” To the contrary, Beers (2009) posits that any correlation suggesting lower cognitive ability has more to do with access to opportunities than cognitive capabilities. She emphasized the need to “educate the public about what literacy ought to look like for *all* children” (p. 4).

Tovani (2011) also noticed a discrepancy in services and a lack of belief in potential:

Unfortunately, struggling readers aren’t given the same opportunities to get smarter as their counterparts in higher tracks are when it comes to engaging with text. [...] It is evident that the underlying assumption is that thinking critically about difficult text is not something that these students are capable of doing. (p. 185)

However, Tovani (2011) continues to talk about why this is unacceptable, “Teaching *all* students to think critically is an issue of equity. Providing rich text, strategic instruction, and opportunities for all kids to read, write, and discuss has as much to do with equity as does race, gender, or economic class” (p. 186).

Demko and Hedrick (2010) addressed issues related to diversity in programs stating:

If a scripted curriculum is used in the Title I schools, and Title I schools are primarily minorities, how do you show value in cultural diversity and help students connect with the readings? [...] You are not allowed to stray from the script, so you would not have the opportunity to help that student really grasp the concepts that are being taught. (p. 63)

English and Steffy (2001) discussed that tests actually assess culture, rather than intelligence. Many reformers and educational advocates have talked about the dangers of blaming or stating excuses for why certain populations of students are not learning, rather than believing that all students can learn (Beers, 2009; Casanova, 2010; Cohen & Solnit, 1995; English & Steffy, 2001; Lipman, 2009; Nieto, 2009; Tatum, 2009), as well as the detriment of whining (Nehring, 2009).

Direction for the Future: Research-Based Needs vs. Policy

NCLB shifted a focus to the responsibility to treat education as a civil right (Pappano, 2010). Nonetheless, in many cases the policies intended to reach that end have not fostered an environment that facilitates equity and a high-quality education for all.

Nehring (2009) stated:

As far as our public schools are concerned, we have become a nation of mindless adoption. Our problems are defined in terms of test scores and demographics; our solutions are off-the-shelf programs that promise results. Implementation is quick and on the cheap. We treat our teachers like an army of technicians who need only to be trained in a one-day workshop. (p. 119)

The shift away from mindful decisions is evident in some accountability enforced reform efforts. Pappano (2010) stated:

School turnaround—this adrenaline-charged moment that we are presently in—is about rapid and dramatic improvement not just in test scores but also in culture, attitude, and student aspirations. It is marked not by orderly implementation but by altering a lot at once and being willing to step in and change—and change

again. It is a new paradigm for education, one not about trusting the process but about seeking results, both measurable and immeasurable. (p. 3)

In order to shift this current context, Nehring (2009) emphasizes the need for the potential for change, requiring mindful practitioners who question and put pressure against established norms in the overall existing school system that are preventing a democratic educational system. However, turnaround also has noble aims, as Pappano (2010) states, “Turnaround is about raising test scores, yes. But it is also about changing lives” (p. 125). There is a need for educators to see the big picture, while reflectively and mindfully advocating for what their students need in order to be successful.

This will continue to be a challenge as deeply entrenched concepts of schooling and policy are in place that may continue to perpetuate current obstacles to our country embodying a democratic education system. Elmore (2008) stated, “The closer an innovation gets to the core of schooling, the less likely it is that it will influence teaching and learning on a large scale” (p. 11). Giroux (2009) advocated for teachers understanding the need for schools to embody democratic principles “dedicated to self- and social empowerment [...] schools can be public places where students learn the knowledge of and skills necessary to create a critical democracy” (p. 445). Bracey (2009) discussed obstacles to democratic schools given the current context, “How democratic can a school be when teachers operate from scripts that permit no variation, when principals sign contracts requiring X points of test gains each year as a condition of employment?” (p. 183).

Reflecting on the impact of NCLB, Elmore (2008) stated:

[...] a nominally conservative administration has, with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), presided over the single most far-reaching nationalization of education policy in the history of the United States. In doing so, it has put the goal of its own education reforms, performance-based accountability, at risk [...] By centralizing education reform in the hands of federal policymakers—not noted for either their patience or sophistication in this area—NCLB has effectively narrowed the range of experimentation with accountability policies, consequently narrowing the learning that can occur across states and localities and increasing the risks of failure and adverse effects. (pp. 201-202)

One of the most recent trends in school is having competitive grants, such as Race to the Top, Title I funding for turnaround efforts, and Investing in Innovation. The grants can be viewed as providing schools with extra funding in order to be innovative (Pappano, 2010).

Another new aspect in national school reform is the Common Core Standards, that some view as national standards as more and more states adopt them. The Common Core Standards can be seen as a potential improvement, as Allington (2012) mentioned, “The new national standards for proficient reading have targeted a more thoughtful literacy than has traditionally been expected of school reading programs” (p. 121). Jago (2011) explains that the Common Core initiative drew off an ACT study “Reading Between the Lines,” which focused on the virtues of complex texts, as a starting point. Jago (2011) stated:

The Common Core Standards have sought to address the lack of rigor in many middle school language arts programs. [...] Mobiles and dioramas will be of little

assistance in preparing students to meet these standards. Neither will worksheets or skill-and-drill lessons. (pp. 110-111)

As such, some educators are hopeful with the shift that CCSS might prompt.

Furthermore, Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) outlined benefits of a national curriculum, including: shared expectations or consistency among states, the potential of a greater focus than typically present in state standards, efficiency in development of standards, assessments, and curriculum, and a higher quality of assessments. Porter et al. (2011) sought to examine how big of a difference the Common Core Standards will represent in comparison to current state standards and assessments, as well as those of Massachusetts and of top-performing countries. The authors were hesitant to make sweeping claims in their findings sections, but noted that it appears that shifts in the Common Core Standards “may represent important increases in quality” (p. 111). When compared to 7th grade standards in Massachusetts, Porter et al. (2011) noted, “Whether these differences between Common Core represents a better curriculum is difficult to judge, although at least at Grade 7 in English Language Arts and Reading, there is a shift in the Common Core Standards toward greater emphasis on higher cognitive demand” (p. 111). In their conclusions, they stated their results demonstrate a shift “toward greater emphasis on higher order cognitive demand” (p. 115); yet, they did not find them to be more focused.

However, there is still much debate about the Common Core Standards. Shanahan (2011) stated, “These standards are a real step forward. But there is one standard at each grade level that is keeping me up at nights [...]” (p. 20) referring to the frame of mind that students will read harder texts, rather than the often common practice of matching

students to texts at an appropriate reading level. Shanahan refers to current practices as what educators “know” but then considers there is not necessarily research to back up matching students to texts vs. having students read more challenging texts. Thus, Shanahan points out that he can see potential advantages to “students spending most of their time reading texts that they are likely to struggle with” (p. 21), while also being concerned about the overall impact on students, stating, “[...] previously, we have tended to over-generalize from younger readers [...] to older readers [...]. Now, I fear that the common core is over-generalizing in the other direction. Harder beginning reading books may stop many young readers in their tracks” (p. 21). In addition, Shanahan (2011) emphasizes that it will be essential for teachers to have training on how to scaffold comprehension of more complex texts to align with the mindset of the Common Core Standards.

Krashen (2011) views the grants and standards as further perpetuating steps in the wrong direction by emphasizing more and more testing. Two consortia, the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Coalition and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) are developing assessments to align with the Common Core Standards. In support of their efforts, they received \$330 million in Race to the Top funds (Porter et al., 2011). Even though Leu et al. (2011) recognize that the intention of the Common Core State Standards was to recognize the importance of online reading comprehension, they question whether the assessments will reflect the skills necessary for on-line reading comprehension based on the language of the standards. Thus, they question if the effort will result in another case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, stating:

The failure to tightly integrate the practices of on-line reading comprehension into national standards or curricula and into the assessments being developed to inform instruction has important consequences for those who are least advantaged in society. Policy misalignments lead to a serious concern for any society based on egalitarian principles: They serve to increase achievement gaps, not close them. (p. 10)

As a result of the lack of language to address 21st century literacies in the standards and the potential impact to fully incorporate them into the assessments, Leu et al. (2011) posit that there will not be incentives to teach them as a result of the mindset of teaching what is tested. They expect the students in the poorest schools to be “doubly disadvantaged” while students in schools representing high socio-economic status will be “doubly privileged” based on access to Internet at home and in school.

Krashen and Ohanian (2011) and Ohanian (2011) also criticize professional organizations for lacking a resistance effort against the Common Core. Ohanian (2011) disapproves of the aims of David Coleman, an author of the Common Core Standards, stance on shifting more importance to informational text, while decreasing the emphasis on personal narrative and fiction. Jago (2011) takes a more neutral stance, stating, “The Common Core Standards alone will neither turn students into readers nor improve student achievement. It is going to require the concerted effort not only of teachers but of our whole society” (p. 109).

In addition, various researchers are questioning how possible it will be to close the achievement gap without addressing larger social issues (Beers, 2009; Bracey, 2009; Brint, 2006; Darder et al., 2009; Gibboney, 2009; Krashen, 2011). Beers (2009) stated,

“In part, students remain stuck because the academic achievement gap does not exist in isolation. It is nursed and nurtured in the arms of poverty. Until we recognize this, we will have failed our children” (p. 5). In talking about one reform leader, Pappano (2010) stated, “He clearly wants them to do more than pass state tests. He wants to give them experiences to help lift them into the middle class, including teaching social skills that entrance requires” (p. 92).

There is hope for positive change when schools place a high value on supporting teachers and fostering their professional development (Pappano, 2010). We are currently at a cross-roads with the direction of education, and the future of education in the United States will depend on how educators and politicians work together to focus on literacy models that emphasize student needs, present-day literacy demands, as well as engagement. Literacy leaders highlight the importance of the decisions we make today. Allington (2011) stated it bluntly when he said:

We can create schools where teachers use a one-size-fits-all core reading program, where we fill up students’ days with worksheets and test-preparation sessions, and where nonexperts in reading instruction are expected to work with large numbers of at-risk readers—and then we can blame the students or their parents for their struggles. Or we can begin by acknowledging that at-risk readers need more expert reading instruction than we have been providing. (p. 44)

Programs will rush to tout how they are aligned to the standards, so there is a need for continual critical dialogues about what the intent of the standards are and the role of professionals in actively engaging in the construction of visions for achieving the standards.

Zimmerman (2011) advocates for the strong role that teachers will need to play, stating:

Something is amiss in American education and teachers are the only people who can fix it--not politicians or administrators or parents, though they can help teachers a great deal. Somewhere along the line we've forgotten that education is not about getting this or that score on a test, but it is about enlarging hearts, minds, and spirits. (p. 36)

Along the same lines, Leu et al. (2011) noted:

Whatever the source of this resistance, there clearly are two paths that diverge for each of us as Robert Frost (1920) so vividly described in his well-known poem, "The Road Not Taken." Down one, we allow others to define the future of reading in terms of our past. Down the other, we step forward and contribute to defining the future of reading for those who follow. The path we choose is important for all of us, but it is especially important for those who have the least access and opportunity to fully engage in the future of reading, online. (p. 11)

Debates and commentaries about the Common Core State Standards are prevalent as educators in the United States prepare for (or try to prevent) the transition to the new standards and assessments. There is a strong need for educators to play an active role in the discussions informed by individual contexts and experiences.

Conclusion

In a standards and accountability-based reform context in the United States, there is much debate about how to effectively impact achievement. While there are merits in

the rationales behind the reforms, there is also a danger in the ways in which schools approach meeting the challenges. For example, some schools narrow the focus to emphasize content included on tests linked to accountability at the expense of other important aspects that are not tested; some schools turn to quick-fix programs rather than investing in the capacity development of educators within their systems; some school cultures result in adolescent aliteracy rather than conditions that motivate students to read; and sometimes approaches can perpetuate achievement gaps rather than the intent of narrowing/eliminating them. Quality research provides pathways to promising practice linked to higher levels of student achievement; however, in some contexts, schools reflect a reliance on other sources in attempts to meet the demands of the reform efforts. In the next chapter, I will provide a framework for examining the impact of school/district response to accountability demands on myself and my former students through narrative inquiry.

CHAPTER THREE: FRAMING THE RESEARCH

Introduction and Research Questions

In their book *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers*, Shagoury and Miller Power (2012) stated:

We sometimes walk a tightrope between who we are as teachers and learners and who we want to be. Once you find a gap that needs to be traversed [...] you have found territory in your classroom that is ripe for questioning. (p. 23)

As I began this research, I was six years into my teaching career within the context of having an ever-increasing emphasis on accountability. From my earliest years, I noticed tensions between avenues to respond to demands of meeting the needs of all students in the classroom. I taught for multiple districts with varying levels of autonomy and sense of self-efficacy. I had focused much of my classroom reflections and self-directed professional development on adolescent literacy and structures to support on-going development and enjoyment of reading and writing.

While writing my dissertation I took a one year leave of absence from my 6th-8th grade language arts position in a dual immersion public charter school in order to fill in as a sabbatical replacement at a local branch campus as a teacher educator. This allowed me the opportunity to step back and closely analyze my career as an educator up until this point and the experiences of my students, as well as to consider future goals as a literacy leader and implications for the field. Shagoury and Miller Power (2012) noted, “[...] we

rarely give ourselves the gift of stepping back and creating a larger portrait of what we know and what we want to learn more about” (p. 71). My experiences this year have provided me with that unique opportunity, with an eye toward improving practice and engaging in dialogue with colleagues about what I have learned that I can contribute to the field.

In this study, I specifically examined the following three questions, narrowing my passion for literacy to a reflection of my experiences as a teacher of reading:

1. How has policy impacted me as a literacy teacher and the decisions I make, as well as the pressure I feel, with regards to reading programs?
2. Which voices have guided, and continue to guide me, in the midst of an accountability-based landscape while building capacity to be an effective literacy leader?
3. How do reading programs, in a time of accountability-based reform efforts, impact students?

Research Design

Personal stories matter. Qualitative research complements existing quantitative research by providing the personal experiences that tell the story of the numbers. I employed narrative methods for this research, but I also drew from other qualitative methods in order to code data to make sense of my experiences and those of my students. By specifically choosing narrative methods from within the qualitative paradigm, I intentionally valued individual stories (both my own and my students’) as a means to closely examine actual experiences and reflect on implications for educational contexts.

During this research, I interpreted the data from narratives and interviews through the lens of narrative approaches, inquiry focusing on the importance of making sense of lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Montero & Washington, 2011; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). As such, I was the research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), my “own most important tool” (Shagoury & Miller Power, 2012, p. 118). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the narrative inquiry space as being three-dimensional, “a set of terms that pointed [narrative inquirers] backward and forward, inward and outward, and located them in place” (p. 54). This describes my research process well as I frequently wrote in order to make sense of data that prompted me to consider the past alongside glimpsing ahead to the future, my experiences and those of my students, and the contextualized setting in which the research was taking place.

Linking specifically to the focal discipline, literacy, Montero and Washington (2011) stated, “[...] inquiry into narrative offers the literacy research community insights that perhaps would not easily be made without analyzing the lived experiences of others” (pp. 339-340). In this research, some of the narratives that I was examining were of my own experiences. Selecting narrative methods assisted in illuminating nuances, providing a fuller picture that other methods might not have revealed. In addition, Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) noted:

We attune our mind’s eye to the stories that will inform our teaching and learning about literacy and language education, and we engage in narrative inquiry and research to illuminate the hidden, the unseen, and the neglected details of meaning as well as those that offer multiple perspectives on various aspects of learning and teaching multifarious literacies. (p. ix)

Revisiting previous documentation of my experiences helped me to better understand past experiences as an educator with more perspective that naturally comes with more experience.

Throughout the process, I frequently wrote about experiences past and present in an attempt to make sense of small moments that ended up forming a web of experiences that have shaped the way I view myself as a professional and the decisions I make. This fits with the methods I selected. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight John Dewey, an advocate for the importance of experience, as one of the main influences of narrative research and mentioned one of his criteria for experience was continuity, “the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (p. 2).

A key aspect of narrative research is temporality, which implies that it is essential to consider the context in which the research was written (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), so I provide background information throughout to frame the context in which the events were taking place. I focused on my experiences as an educator who began my career shortly after No Child Left Behind legislation was enacted up until the present day when another reform effort, the Common Core State Standards, is front and center in the educational landscape.

I also focused on some of my most recent students’ experiences, remembering back to their time in my classroom as 6th-8th graders in my classroom and reflecting on their transition to the high school. This aligns with the selected approach, as “Narrative research is about understanding experience as lived and told stories that capture unquantifiable personal and human dimensions of life” (Montero & Washington, 2011, p.

331). Thus, when considering the research questions examining the impact of policy on teachers and students, utilizing narrative methods to seek a deep understanding is a natural fit. The qualitative design captures the why and the further explanation of various sources of data, as well as the underlying influences that impact thoughts, feelings, and decisions.

In addition, narrative research appeals to researchers with a social justice perspective (Montero & Washington, 2011), and much of my convictions against one-size-fits-all scripted instruction are rooted in issues of democracy and social justice. Throughout the process, I am forthright about my experiences that shape who I am and my beliefs as an educator so that those reading my research will have a clear understanding of various influences on my perspective.

Researcher's Role

In this study, I fill the dual role of researcher and participant. I examine my own history as a teacher, alongside students' voices, knowing that I cannot truly examine their experiences without closely considering my literacy philosophies and how they emerged over time. The combination of both our experiences informs the research questions in a deeper sense, providing a lens into analyzing teaching and learning side by side. My involvement in the research and the influence of my experiences on the analysis process is clearly outlined through narratives focusing on my experiences as an educator.

Contexts and Researcher Role in Contexts

In this study, I use pseudonyms for all towns, schools, and students. Murray is a rural community in the Pacific Northwest of 11,366 residents, a median household

income of \$34,444, and 41.3% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino in origin (U.S. Census, 2010). It is the largest town in the county, which is termed as the “poorest in the state” and is listed as being one of the top ten poorest counties in the United States (Geldis, 2012).

While narratives of my teaching experiences briefly mention a first-year teaching in a different community within the same state, all of my other narratives take place within this same community, referring to the middle school and a K-8 charter school. The students’ narratives reflect on experiences within the same K-8 charter school and their freshman year at the community’s high school. However, as noted within the narrative, one student’s high school narrative refers to Rhine High School, located in her hometown within the same county.

Murray Middle School

Part of my narratives focus on experiences while teaching at Murray Middle School. In the years referenced for the study, Murray Middle School served around 660-680 students in 6th-8th grade. Entering sixth graders came from the district’s five elementary schools, while some may have attended other schools, including local religious schools for their K-5 education. At the time of the research, the school had never met AYP. In order to provide context for the narratives, I will share related to Murray Middle School, I provide here a brief history of the district’s vision and attempts to better meet students’ literacy needs around that period of time.

Table 1: Murray Middle School Approaches to NCLB Background

Year	Important Events/Decisions
05-06 Year prior to starting to work for the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to increase the literacy levels of middle school students • Creation of three reading teacher positions • Focus on “bubble students,” those who were or were anticipated to being very close to meeting grade level expectations on their state reading assessments
06-07 My first year with the district as one of three reading teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A continued focus on increasing literacy levels of middle school students • Focus on next ability level down from the “bubble students” utilizing a commercially prepared curriculum focusing on comprehension strategies and autonomy to supplement and make instructional decisions • District in the process of a School Improvement Grant (SIG) application, resulting in a cadre visiting another school in the state to consider their reading programs
07-08 My second year with the district as one of three reading teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New schedule as a result of the SIG and the model of the other school district • All students have Study Skills, ability grouped classes to focus on reading for their first period of the day based on state reading assessments, measures of oral reading fluency (more accurately rate), and program assessments • Reading teachers expected to utilize scripted programs with fidelity in a rigid manner, rather than being able to make instructional decisions based on individual students’ demonstrated needs • Aside from Study Skills, reading teachers had targeted students for “double-doses” during other periods • School-wide home reading requirement through reading logs

Mariposa Charter

Another part of my narratives focus on my experiences teaching at a public dual immersion charter school sponsored by the state department of education. Mariposa Charter began as a K-1 dual immersion school and added on a grade level each year until it reached its K-8 capacity. When the school added its first 6th grade class, I started teaching at the school. Thus, I taught the student participants during their 6th-8th grade years in the following subjects in both English and Spanish: 6th Grade: All subjects in a

self-contained classroom, 7th Grade: Reading, Writing, and Social Studies, and 8th Grade: Reading and Writing. Students participating in the study attended the school for at least their 6th through 8th grade years. The participants who started at the school were in the first grade class when the school opened. As such, they grew along with the school. Participants who were new to the school previously attended elementary schools within the Murray School District.

The school focuses on a high level of teacher autonomy in creating curriculum aligned with state grade level state standards and with research-based promising practices in mind, rather than relying on pre-packaged curriculum. In addition, high priority is placed on integrating literature into the curriculum. The school contrasts to other schools in the community that utilize scripted instruction for additional reading support in their elementary, middle, and high schools similar to many other school districts since the passage of NCLB.

Murray High School

When graduating from Mariposa Charter, most students transition to the community's high school. Murray High School serves around 740 9th-12th graders. It has never met AYP, and for the 2010-2011 school year, it was labeled as In Need of Improvement. In the 2010-2011 school year, Murray High School implemented changes as a result of receiving a School Improvement Grant utilizing a transformation model. The grant application stated the high school was identified as being in the bottom 5% of schools within the state.

Participants

In addition to myself as a participant, I interviewed thirteen former students (8 females and 5 males) who I taught for their 6th – 8th grade years at Mariposa Charter. I selected participants based on availability and willingness, a convenience sample of students from the graduating 8th grade class who had attended the school for at least the last three years. Throughout the year, I conducted three rounds of interviews; however, the availability of students changed for each round. When interviewing students who had not participated in previous rounds, I asked questions from a hybrid of the current and previous round questions. The following table and student snapshots illustrate the rounds in which each student participated and provide a glimpse into each student.

Table 2: Participants and Interview Rounds

Name (Pseudonym)	August 2011	November/December 2011	April/May 2012
Daniel	8/23/11	11/21/11	5/18/12
David	8/23/11	11/11/11	4/27/12
Diego	8/23/11		
Emiliano	8/22/11	*	4/27/12
Giovanni	*	11/21/11	5/18/12
Diana		*	4/27/12
Erika	8/23/11	Via email 12/10/11	Via email 5/4/12
Esmerelda	8/23/11		
Lorena	8/22/11		
Miriam	*	11/22/11	5/18/12
Nancy	8/23/11		
Renata	8/22/11	11/11/11	4/27/12
Rocío	8/23/11		
Total Participants/ Round	10 *12	6 *8	8

*I asked questions/prompts from this round of interviews when I met with the student in the following interview. For example, Emiliano was unavailable for the second round, but I asked him those questions/prompts when I met with him for the third round of interviews. The * totals provide the number of students from whom I gained insights related to the questions/prompts from that round of interviews.

To provide further background about each of the participants, I provide below a brief snapshot of each student during their middle school years based on my recollections. At times, I also weave in quotes from them about themselves as readers as well as information from documents such as start of the year surveys or blog posts that they wrote.

Daniel

Daniel always loved to laugh and make others do so. He avidly read within specific genres or series that captured his interest, such as the *Warriors* series by Erin Hunter. However, he also expressed an interest in a wider range of genres and I sometimes prompted him to do so through book clubs. For example, *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson captured his interest as a 6th grader. As an 8th grader he revisited it as one of his favorite book club selections and co-led an on-line book club with it for 6th and 7th graders. He joined the school as an upper elementary student, and as such had a much higher level of literacy in English than in Spanish. During Spanish weeks, he would often slip an English book inside of his Spanish book or choose a book that happened to have a Spanish title but was almost exclusively written in English to see how long it would take me to catch on. He was playful in nature and often needed scaffolding in being able to focus, rather than being distracted by having conversations with his friends.

David

It was a rare moment that David would walk into the classroom without sparking a conversation. He was often enthusiastically sharing about a recent athletic experience. He attended the school since its opening his first grade year, and as such, he had a high level of comfort and engaged in conversations with a range of staff members. It was sometimes challenging to match David with books that would capture his interest. He would talk about reading related to extrinsic motivators, such as his grades, rather than for enjoyment. However, there were specific topics that were more likely to engage him, including sports and war. Toward the end of his 8th grade year, David started to focus more on wanting to do well academically, whereas before his motivation was high during sport seasons but waned during the off-seasons. When asked at the end of his first interview if there was anything else that he wanted to tell me about himself as a reader, he said, “That I’ve gotten better over the summer. That I can do better in high school and exceed what I want to do” (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

Diego

Diego transferred to the school as a 6th grader after attending one of the local elementary schools within the Murray School District. In the classroom he was typically quiet unless he was with some of his closest friends. He did not express an interest for reading; however, at times he seemed to have more interest in specific books about soccer or war. He did express a strong desire to do well in school and was highly respectful; however, at times he seemed frustrated or lost confidence in himself as a reader based on aspects such as state test performance. He had a high level of test anxiety, which compounded this.

Emiliano

Emiliano attended the school since his second grade year (start of the year questionnaire, August 2008). He self-identifies as not enjoying reading; however, he did bring in his brother's copy of *Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Draper as a seventh grader and expressed an interest in the book. Nonetheless, he did not have a dramatic shift in his motivation to read even though he had access to other books by Draper. From time to time he would once again have a higher level of interest in a specific book, such as *The Hunger Games* when he read it for book clubs as an 8th grader. As he is interested in going into the military after high school, he was also engaged in book clubs focusing on books with military-related plots.

Giovanni

Giovanni transitioned to the school his sixth grade year after attending elementary school in the Murray School District. His classmates often reflected on how quiet he was in the first year and how his personality emerged in the seventh and eighth grade. As a reader, he had dramatic shifts in interest level. After Emiliano loaned him *Tears of a Tiger* mid-way through his seventh grade year, he frequently asked to see if I could get other books by Draper. He also started to talk to me about buying more “guy books” for the classroom library. Problem novels especially captured his interest, and he began to read multiple books per week. Eventually, he gave in to Daniel's constant prodding to read the *Warriors* series and then started to read them rapidly. When I interviewed him for a class assignment toward the end of his seventh grade year, he said that his mom noticed the drastic shift in his reading by commenting, “Ay, siempre te la pasas leyendo” (You're always reading) (personal communication, May 20, 2010).

When he returned as an 8th grader, Giovanni stumped me as he was not reading as avidly initially. It took a while to spark his interest once again; however, part way through his interest was similar to his seventh grade year. He continued to ask me if I had bought certain books and upon receiving a book frequently returned to provide his critiques and opinions. Though he typically read realistic fiction, he also enjoyed dystopia, such as *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and he continued to read more of the *Warriors* series.

Diana

Throughout her middle school years, Diana's sense of confidence with speaking or performing in front of a group emerged. She started at the school as a first grader, and enjoyed reading and discussing books from the time I met her in sixth grade. Though she rarely provided comments during whole class interactions, she thrived in small groups, including casual conversations while lining up for lunch. She often read quickly through a book but then lingered as she approached the conclusion, not wanting it to end, such as with the *Twilight* series as a 6th grader. As an 8th grader she said that she would never get tired of the series but also identified as loving historical fiction and romance, such as Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry* (course assignment, fall 2010).

Erika

Erika remembers her mom surrounding her with books her whole life and considers all of her family members to be readers (personal communication, August 23, 2011). She avidly read a wide range of texts (in both genres and reading levels). While at times she read books written for adults, other times she re-read some of her favorites,

such as *The Tale of Desperaux* and the Harry Potter series. She was able to closely analyze author's craft and determined that she preferred first person narrative voice because of the way she could connect more closely to the narrators.

Esmeralda

Similar to some of her peers, Esmeralda also had a passion for reading. It was fairly easy for her to find books to read and often read series, such as the *Cinderella Cleaners* series. Despite her frequent reading, Esmeralda often had gaps in comprehension with the text that she read. As she had a strong grasp on decoding and read with fluency, much of the time we focused on comprehension strategies and the meaning making process with her, as well as continually developing vocabulary in English. Esmeralda attended two other schools in the Murray school district before transferring to Mariposa in her early elementary grades (start of the year questionnaire, August 2008).

Lorena

Lorena joined the school as a second grader (start of the year questionnaire, August 2008). Over her middle school years, Lorena established a love of reading, ever-increasingly present with each grade level. Toward the end of her sixth grade year she realized that she could explore lived experiences through books, selecting *Just Another Day in My Insanely Real Life* by Barbara Dee as her favorite book of the year. By the time she was an 8th grader, it was not that uncommon to see her slowly walking in the halls while reading a book. On an 8th grade trip, she was sitting on a bench at our outdoor

camp reading while classmates were preparing to roast marshmallows or racing up and down a steep hill. Eventually, she joined in on conversations and making s'mores.

While she was reading Simone Elkeles' *Leaving Paradise*, I mentioned that I had just received the sequel and would try to read it over the weekend so that she could read it next. The only problem was, when I read it over the weekend, I realized that it had more mature themes than the first one. I kicked myself for having already mentioned I had the other book and wondered if she would forget, but of course she did not. I hinted at the content and let her know that she would need to double check with her mom (even though her mom had previously signed a form giving permission for her to have access to YA novels that might include mature content).

The next day she had permission. As I handed her over the book, I let her know to just return it if she ended up feeling uncomfortable with the content. The following day when I walked into my classroom the book was sitting on my desk. I assumed that she decided against it; however, I was wrong. She liked it so much that she had read it all upon arriving from school the evening prior. She continued to easily connect with a range of books throughout the remainder of the year.

Miriam

One of the original students when the school opened, Miriam came to school with a smile and positive attitude daily. She enjoyed reading and talking to classmates about her books. She dutifully read and filled out her reading log, reading a range of genres. In her 8th grade year she began to heavily read problem novels but also still enjoyed lighter books, such as *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books.

Nancy

Nancy identifies herself as learning to love reading because she found the right books to capture her interest (personal communication, August 23, 2011). She identified J.K. Rowling as her favorite author and fantasy as her favorite genre (course assignment, fall 2010). However, the range of genres that she enjoyed expanded over the three years. She frequently engaged in conversations with friends about the latest book she was reading and brought many books from home. Coming into a dual immersion school as a native English speaker as a 6th grader was difficult, but Nancy rose to the challenge.

Renata

Renata started at Mariposa as a first grader. She self-identified enjoying romance, fantasy, and mystery, although romance was her favorite genre (course assignment, fall 2010). In her middle school years, when it was time for book orders, Renata's family often ordered a stack, frequently including at least one book for each member of the family. She would also bring in books that her mom had bought for her at book stores, always excited to share her newest reads. In addition, when I take my daughters to the public library, I often see her family. Toward the end of her 8th grade year, her mom let me know that through the books that she was bringing home from the classroom since the 6th grade, Renata was able to spark her mom's interest in reading. She specifically enjoyed that Renata introduced her to *The Lightning Thief* series. Thus, Renata was surrounded by readers influencing each other at home.

Rocío

When I met Rocío as a 6th grader, she had already been at the school for 4 years (start of the year questionnaire, August 2008). Much like the other female participants, Rocío consistently read avidly and typically found books she would like to read with ease, especially fantasies and mysteries. As an 8th grader, she identified Rick Riordan as being her favorite author (course assignment, fall 2010). Like Renata, she often bought books through the book orders. She would often read above and beyond the minimum requirement of at least 30 minutes per evening. She expressed increasing her level of motivation to read as her comprehension in English and Spanish improved (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data for this study from two primary sources: written documentation of my teaching experiences and interviews with former students. I had additional supplementary data from limited observations and artifacts from the three years that I taught the student participants. Below I explain the data sources in more detail.

Teacher Narratives Construction

While constructing my personal narratives, I relied heavily on written documentation from the time of the experiences, as well as assignments that I had written to reflect back on previous experiences. In one of my first doctoral courses, we had an assignment to write an educational memoir (course assignment, August 12, 2010). Through the assignment, I reflected on my undergraduate and graduate years, including student teaching, as well as the first five years of my teaching career at three different

schools. This document served as a critical field text that I then revised in order to convert to a research text for the purpose of this study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Another core document that supported my ability to capture the experiences of teaching with a scripted curriculum in the third year of my teaching was a practicum journal. It entailed different parts, including a section titled “What I Did” with introductory framing paragraphs followed by entries from September 4, 2007 until November 7, 2007 for each school day with a few exceptions. The additional sections were reflections about what I learned about teaching, myself as a teacher, and the children I was teaching.

Interview Data Collection

For each round of interviews, I developed interview questions/prompts (see Appendices A-C). Students returned to Mariposa Charter for their interviews, allowing for a safe environment in which to express their thoughts. In accordance with the qualitative paradigm, I viewed the questions as a starting point, but I incorporated other follow-up questions in the interviews depending on student responses. I also reworded for clarity if they were unsure of some of the questions. I found myself rewording future interviews to align with what made sense to students in previous interviews. In the third round of interviews, in addition to uniform questions/prompts, I asked some students individualized follow-up questions specifically related to something they said in the previous interviews.

I recorded each interview with a digital recorder to ensure accuracy, which I transcribed fully for the first two rounds. For the third round, I did partial transcriptions focusing on the information that was relevant to the emerging themes of the study. One

student who lived and attended high school in a different community requested to participate in the second and third rounds via email. As such, her responses were already captured in writing, but it did not have the same back and forth element of the oral interviews. Nonetheless, her responses provided another layer to consider and a glimpse into another high school experience.

When scheduling, I tried to allot enough time to conduct interviews and reflect via memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and researcher reflexivity journal entries (Kleinsasser, 2000; Montero & Washington, 2011) before continuing on with other interviews; however, when this was not possible, I reflected on a group of interviews whenever there was a break. While my memos and reflexivity journals started out as a formal document, I soon recognized that I was reflecting throughout the day, sometimes weeks after the interviews. For example, I often processed ideas while commuting to classes and tried to jot a couple of quick key words; thoughts came to mind while at work, so I would send myself an email; I wrote blog posts; and I frequently made notes in text of my work in progress of ideas to consider. Thus, I had both formal and informal memos and reflexivity journals. See Appendix D for some examples.

Data Analysis Procedures

Teacher Narratives

Throughout my teaching career, I have participated in a process of reflective practice, with frequent written reflections, including formal assignments as described in the data collection section. During my inquiry, I continued to write and collect my thoughts, leading to multiple field texts related to my narratives and making sense of my

experiences. As the study emerged and students' input via interviews guided the research, I considered which of the many stories from my career were most relevant. The process of frequently cycling back and writing to explore my emerging understandings influenced my analysis procedure of discovering what was important with regards to teaching in the context of accountability-based reforms. Feedback from committee members also shaped my narratives. Writing and revisiting helped me to compose research texts to make sense of my experience, the narratives included in this study, from multiple field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Informed by the description of data analysis in Foss and Waters (2007), upon completion of my narratives, I went through and formally coded my narratives. Deciding to code my narratives was more aligned with general qualitative methods, rather than the more specific narrative methods. However, it was an opportunity for me to examine my experience at a different level and make my understanding from this process more explicit. For each paragraph, I determined at least one code. While I started out my coding process by trying to detach myself in order to write a non-biased code solely based on what was present, in the process I realized that in coding personal narratives it was more relevant to code based on relevance or importance for inclusion in the narrative. I asked myself questions such as: Why did I include this? How has this shaped me? After coding all of the narratives, I cut out by code and made a copy of any section that had more than one code. I then sorted all of the codes and began to combine similar concepts. I wrote key descriptors on post-it notes next to piles. Once I established piles, I checked that each excerpt fit and adjusted accordingly. Then I used paperclips to group the pieces of paper together, attaching the post-it to the top. Finally, I began to organize

the piles in different ways in order to develop a schema of the relationships between the different concepts. A sample of my coding process is present in Appendix E.

Student Interviews

I coded transcripts with descriptive codes to consider emerging trends and narrow down the focus of the findings (Foss & Waters, 2007). I fully transcribed the first round of interviews and analyzed with open coding. After fully transcribing the second round of interviews, I began to analyze with a priori codes informed by the codes that emerged during the first interview analysis. A priori codes included the presence or lack of each of the aspects that students highlighted in their original interviews. I also had open-coding for the second round of interviews in order to discover what else was emerging as main concepts from the data. As such, codes such as outside literacies and encouragement to read were added as I continued on with the process.

Codes from the first two interviews informed the questions/prompts for the third round of interviews. I utilized the third round of interviews to better understand aspects that students mentioned in earlier rounds, as well as to gauge what (if anything) had changed since the previous round. I partially transcribed the third round of interviews after familiarizing myself with the audios, as I was already attuned to what was most relevant to the research by that point. Finally, I read through the transcripts for the interviews multiple times to see if there were any other themes that I wanted to explore.

While coding, I realized that the questions and prompts in many ways represented casting a wide net, and eventually I had to determine which responses were most relevant to this particular study, including what seemed to resonate for the group of participants in order to make sense of their experience. I made note of aspects that fascinated me and

that I would want to revisit in the future but that I needed to disregard currently for the sake of focus and clarity.

After coding sections, I wrote the titles on sticky notes that I then organized on a table in order to create a visual of the inter-connected relationships between the concepts. Once I had a conceptual organization, I began to cut apart transcripts that I labeled by participant and date to sort relevant comments with each of the codes. A sample of how I coded interview transcripts is available in Appendix F.

Observations

I was able to observe five class periods at Murray High School during the study. Three of the observations were of different periods of an English 9 class on the same day, so I saw the teacher repeat the lesson to three different groups. On a different day, I returned to observe the same teacher in the first half of a double-block *Language!* class. Then I saw a different teacher with the same commercially prepared curriculum teaching a single block, as the first classroom was going to have a Valentine's Day pizza party rather than a second block of instruction for that time slot. While observing, I kept field notes that I then revisited and considered in relation to my previous experiences and to student comments during interviews.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers focus on the importance of trustworthiness when engaging in research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline areas in which researchers can be cognizant throughout the process. The following are layers of my research that supported a sense of trustworthiness. First, in order to establish credibility, I had prolonged engagement in the

field. For the questions related to experiences as a teacher, I was engaging in narrative inquiry looking back over six years of my career. I had known student participants as their teacher for the three years prior to nine month period in which I met with students to conduct interviews.

In addition, after analyzing interview data and drafting out my thoughts, I requested that students who were available return one final time to member check their statements about their high school experiences. I shared any comments that they had stated that I was including in the draft as well as an indication of how I had interpreted the collective comments in order to provide an opportunity for students to confirm, clarify, or add to their original statements.

I also had a layer of triangulation by relying on data from multiple sources, such as personal narratives of experience, student interviews, and familiarity with the educational context. For example, I considered statements that students made through the lens of what I knew about the district all but one student attended for high school from being an employee for two years. I also had limited observations to consider through the lens of my previous experiences in the same district as well as student input.

In order to establish a sense of transferability I included thick descriptions. My narratives of experience prior to presenting and analyzing student interview data provide a detailed account of events that shaped my construction of identity as an educator, as well as my convictions as a literacy leader. Intermixed with student interview data, I continued to provide shorter narratives to show my thought process along the way. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, "In narrative inquiry, our field texts are always interpretive, always composed by an individual at a certain moment in time," (p. 84).

Thus, by sharing my thought process as I sifted through the data in the form of field texts, I provide readers of the research insights into who I was as an individual during the time of the research. Whether or not readers agree with my stance, they can use the thick description present to consider the transferability of my analysis and recommendations to their own contexts.

In order to establish confirmability, I have documentation to build an audit trail. For raw data I have core previous written reflections related to my teaching experience that I used as field texts that served as the core of the narratives that I presented. In addition, I have the audio and transcripts of student interviews. I also have observation notes from the limited observations at the high school. To be transparent with my process of analysis, I have copies of coding on narratives and interviews, as well as the grouped piles and notes to map out relationships between the various concepts. In addition, I also have some of my reflective documents that I wrote during the process, such as memos about the data and researcher reflexivity journals. Unfortunately, the hard drive on my personal computer crashed as I neared the end of my data collection. While I was fortunate to have many of my files in multiple locations, I had not saved my reflexivity and memos to a secondary location. Thus, the documentation I have are limited to handwritten entries and those that I typed while at work.

Limitations

A limitation of all qualitative research is that it is contextualized. In the case of this research, the bulk of the experiences were embedded in two different school systems in a rural community. Based on the description provided, others will have to determine transferability to their own contexts.

An additional limitation to this study is the number of participants. The questions related to the teaching side of the impact of policy were limited to a self-study of my own experience. Thus, I am able to provide an in-depth portrait and analysis of experience; however, it is limited to the systematic examination of one person, rather than multiple educators. The number of student participants was also relatively small. Thus, data analysis and recommendations need to take the limited number of participants into mind.

A third limitation is that all of the participants knew me well. While this was an advantage in allowing them to share their experiences with someone who they already knew and strengthened credibility because of prolonged engagement, the relationship may have influenced what participants shared. In addition, the participants were a convenience sample. While I was able to interview slightly over half of the students in the graduating 8th grade class, I did not have an opportunity to hear about the experiences of the remaining students. The number of participants available for the follow-up interviews regarding high school experiences decreased as well. Although, the available participants did provide a lot of comments about their experiences, it would have been ideal to have heard from additional students.

Conclusion

Narrative inquiry informed by experiences, student interviews, and limited high school observations provided a lens with which I could consider my research questions related to the accountability landscape of education and its impact on teachers and students with regards to reading instruction and encouragement to read. Considering my students' experiences parallel to my own journey as an educator provided me with important insight to inform implications for myself and others in the field in the

following chapter. In the following chapter, I present my research texts and my analysis of them.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH TEXTS

The following chapter incorporates a blend of narratives about my own teaching experiences in the first six years of my career, including being a high school ESL teacher, being a middle school reading teacher at Murray Middle School, and teaching 6th-8th grade at Mariposa Charter, a dual immersion school. I taught additional content areas, such as one section of high school Spanish and some middle school ESL classes; however, that is not reflected in the narratives in order to narrow down to experiences most relevant to this research. I chronicle events and moments that have shaped me as an educator in developing a sense of what matters with regards to literacy, specifically reading programs.

I also layer in information from interviews of former Mariposa Charter students reflecting back on the three years that they were in my classroom, as well as sharing about their transition to high school. During their freshman year, I was able to observe five class periods at Murray High School in order to notice how my observations aligned with their comments. I also considered what I knew about the district from being an employee for two years. A table of participants and the rounds of interviews in which they were able to participate, as well as a snapshot description of each student as a reader are present in Chapter Three.

In the first section of my narratives, there are letters to previous students. Inspired by Kylene Beers' letters to George in her *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*

(Beers, 2003), the thoughts recorded are based on reflections over time about specific students who have greatly informed my development as a teacher. The letters reflect what I knew at the time, experiences that helped me decide why certain programs did not align with my personal teaching and learning philosophies, and what I had learned about their specific needs. As such, these letters are not an actual document that I gave to students, but rather a means to personalize reflections to specific students. Because I did not interview students from these phases in my career, the letters also serve as an opportunity to weave in some of the student voices.

My Before

First-Year Teacher - Entering the Field

The gears in my brain churned away, screaming at me to get out of bed and start documenting the flow of ideas. I tiptoed to my backpack to grab paper and a pen and sat on the floor next to the hotel window, not wanting to wake my master colleagues. A bit of sunlight was streaming through the crack in the blinds, just barely enough to see. My hand flew across the paper, and I felt the great feeling that comes with writing thoughts onto the page.

At the education fair I had eased into a free-flowing conversation with a co-principal about how I would teach reading to high school students who were still struggling. I felt an instant connection, and though I did not even know when the interview process would begin or if I would get the job, on the inside I was already buzzing with excitement about the possibility. I relived the chance meeting the day before as my ideas spilled out.

Once I could not think of anything else to write, I tucked my notebook back into my bag. Later I would add to the list, revise it, and eventually shape my first units. A few weeks after the education fair, I had accepted a position for the district that ignited so much passion from a single conversation.

A fascination with other languages and cultures, as well as a combination of experiences such as volunteering to teach adult ESL courses with other students from my undergraduate Spanish classes, travel to Mexico, ESOL/Bilingual Education coursework, and getting to know my husband and his family's educational experiences sparked a passion for educational issues related to English Language Learners (ELLs). Nonetheless, the county where I had gone to school (kindergarten-college) had a very limited ELL population. While I had read many resources about promising practices with ELLs, there were not any K-12 classes in my county for ELLs because there was only a student here or there. I had never had a chance to student teach in a school that had a high ELL population or observe a master teacher. The closest experience I had was through a practicum experience in English as a foreign language classes at an urban private high school/university in Mexico, which was not exactly the same.

With excitement and trepidation, I entered my first year of teaching. It was a busy year, both with the demands of first year teaching and complications in my personal life, yet the process of deep reflection and considering implications for the classroom was invigorating. Toward the end of the year I regretfully resigned from my position in order to move back closer to family, but I would never forget my students and all that I learned from them about what it feels like to be an adolescent identified as needing additional academic support.

Dear Rogelio,

My first year of teaching was a whirlwind. No matter how much I planned over the summer, nothing would prepare me enough to know the needs of you and your classmates. Back then I thought it was because it was my first year. Surely, some of it was, but now I know that I always have to allow for flexibility in planning based on individuals within the class. Once the school year got started and I realized the diversity among your needs, I reevaluated my plans and tried to think of how I could differentiate more. Luckily, part of the induction program was providing time to have a substitute teacher come in so that I could do some additional planning. I took the time to try to decide how to group students the best. Unfortunately, it was still early in the year, and I did not have that much to inform my decisions – just a couple of weeks of observations, assignments, and Woodcock-Muñoz data.

According to your Woodcock-Muñoz score, you were still functioning at a lower level of proficiency. Later I learned that you did not take that assessment seriously. During the administration you remembered hearing that you should relax and that it would not affect you in any way. You were sick of it – the same test year after year. You felt belittled, so you purposely gave an inaccurate picture of your capabilities. Much to your chagrin, the results did indeed affect you, landing you right in my class.

Too bad I found out after I had already grouped you within the class below where you needed to be for a little while. You let me know that you were offended to be placed in the classroom with newcomers to the country. Even though there were plenty of students in English Learning Lab who had lived in the United States for the majority or

all of their education, your particular class period did have more students still learning the basics of English.

You continued to express your disdain for testing throughout the year. When I reminded the class that you did not have to get out your composition books because we were going to the library to participate in the pilot test for our state's new English language proficiency assessment you made a comment about it being the Mexican test.

At different points of the year you talked to me about your process applying for college. You were frustrated that your counselor made you feel like you were not college material. You checked in with me after taking a placement test telling me what you needed to work on in reading and writing, wondering how you could improve. I gave you some suggestions and talked to you about how what we were doing in class was all geared toward those objectives.

Yet, you still did not seem to have a lot of buy in. One time when you and your classmates were supposed to do a quick write reflection about motivation linked to an overcoming obstacles unit we were starting, you wrote a few sentences describing a person straining to reach the remote control without getting up. I remember laughing as I read your notebook, as well as sharing that with you when I handed it back but also letting you know that the response did not meet up to the requirements to receive full credit.

Throughout the spring, you kept on checking in with me about college. It was perfect because my experiences were still fresh in mind and I had worked in my university's admissions office, so I knew about different procedures. You ended up dual

enrolling at a community college and university with hopes of switching over to being fully enrolled at the university, joining your older brother.

Toward the end of the school year I was left with doubts about the effectiveness of what we did in class. Your continued resistance made me wonder. I realized that for some students just having to be in an “additional support class” was enough of a reason to spur distaste for a class, but I wanted to make sure to consider other explanations as well. Did the way I chose to use class time benefit you and your classmates? What should I have done differently?

The daily journal was one component that I could not quite figure out. On your last week of school, right before graduation, you came up to me during the study hall portion of class, catching me completely off guard. I was at the back of the room picking up some assignments to hand back. You came up to me and let me know that one of your other teachers complemented you on your writing. You mentioned something like that had never happened before and attributed your growth to all of the writing we did in class. Then you thanked me.

That comment might not have seemed like a big deal to you. I wonder if you even remember it today, but I do. It was a reminder that yes, providing time and space to write is powerful. I still had a lot of reflecting to do in order to improve what I did, but you confirmed that allowing time to write was time well spent.

Second-Year Teacher - Focusing on Reading at Murray Middle School

After spending the summer in Mexico, I was excited to start my new role as a reading specialist at a middle school in a new community within the same state. Because

of the fascination with narrowing my focus in on reading once I started my reading endorsement coursework, I thought that teaching small groups of students to provide additional reading support would be my ideal teaching position. Soar to Success was the main curriculum resource for my 6th through 8th graders, but I was also able to integrate in other components, such as literature circles with novels (Daniels, 2002; Daniels & Steineke, 2004). While researching about literature circles, Daniels (2002) made me think about the concept of misusing a promising practice. He discussed how he thought that many teachers overused his literature circles roles. This made me reflect on the reasoning behind roles and other similar activities to provide scaffolding and to always be mindful to only provide the support when needed and to release that responsibility to the students when they were ready.

It was very fulfilling to try to get to know each individual student and decide what was preventing him/her from being considered a proficient grade level reader. Not all students were thrilled to be in my class, just as with my ESL classes the year before. Knowing that students were missing another course in order to receive additional support and their attitudes toward it made me consider the best possible support in order for them to get back to where they wanted to be.

Each student was a complicated puzzle, bringing different experiences and attitudes toward reading, as well as an array of strengths and weaknesses. My reading endorsement courses were an excellent resource in learning more about each of my students and to reflect on my practice. I also sought out resources that focused on adolescent literacy or older struggling readers (Beers, 2003; Fink, 2006; Tovani, 2000), avidly reading resources to try to determine what would make an impact on each student.

Throughout the year I learned a vast amount, but I also realized that there was still so much to learn about adolescent literacy. Soar to Success is a program that utilizes fiction and non-fiction trade books and workbooks to move students from below grade level toward grade-level. Although it is advertised as including decoding to aid comprehension, it was not as big a focus as comprehension strategies in general (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). Not surprisingly, it seemed to work most effectively with students whose main area for growth was related to the meaning making process. For the most part students enjoyed the books, which aided in increasing engagement and motivation to read. The workbook component was comparatively not as motivating.

While there were a lot of benefits of Soar to Success as a resource combined with teacher autonomy to include aspects such as literature circles and read alouds, I knew that there were other students who were not receiving the type of reading assistance they needed, such as those who still needed a stronger foundation in decoding words or fluency. My curiosity about supporting these aspects of reading continued to grow. Coursework toward my reading endorsement helped me to expand my knowledge related to reading instruction, and I continued to think about the unique differences among students placed in courses designed to provide additional support.

Dear Susana,

You were a challenge for me this year, and I was not quite sure how to respond. I realized quickly that you did not belong in my class based on what I expected to be reasons why students would be assigned a reading intervention period. You see, you were a very capable reader. I wondered if like other students I had, you did not see a reason to

give your full effort on standardized assessments, which then led to you being in my classroom.

It was difficult trying to discover what I could do to motivate you. I quickly realized that I was not going to get very far with power struggles. You were able to wait out almost any amount of time that I would give you when trying to have one on one discussions with you. Eventually, you would provide small pieces of input though, giving me something to grasp onto when trying to figure you out.

Not long before the end of the school year I saw you in the halls. I told you about what I mentioned when requested to provide information for your parole officer about your progress. I let you know that I passed on that you were very intelligent but sometimes your resistance to participate in class was holding you back. I saw your eyes light up. I don't think that you had heard very many people tell you that they were proud of you or to let you know how much potential you had.

I still see you every once in a while and I reflect on what you taught me about the dangers of placing kids in interventions based on test scores, rather than considering multiple sources of data and really knowing kids as people. It also makes me wonder what else I can do for similar students who walk into my classroom. I was only a second year teacher. I don't think that I was fully equipped to provide you with everything that you needed, but I kept on trying throughout the year as I got to know you more. I will never forget the need to wonder about the underlying attitudes, motivations, and circumstances behind outward behaviors.

Interlude - Summer for Educators

A couple of weeks after school let out, I left for Mexico, participating in a Summer for Educators exchange program. Prior to the end of the school year, I found out that I would need to use a scripted program the following year. Promising practices in literacy were on my mind, and I was nervous about how it would be using a scripted program. The visiting professor for the program, Marsha Riddle Buly, mentioned a study that she had conducted looking at different needs that readers have who do not demonstrate grade-level proficiency on standardized assessments, showing that not all students need remediation for the same reasons (Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004). She prompted me to think about different needs and the ideal instruction to match up to those needs. Though I was not able to differentiate types of curriculum based on student needs the next year, the ideas remained at the forefront of my mind.

Third-Year Teacher - Scripted Instruction at Murray Middle School

Introduction

I opened up the box and pulled out the brand new document camera and sighed. I remembered when we wrote the technology request as a reading team and thought about all of the ways we would be able to utilize the technology to enhance our reading instruction. Only that was then; this was now. Then we had flexibility. Now we had scripts and strict orders to teach “with fidelity.” What was I going to do, project my script and have them read along with me, a preview of exactly what I was going to say?

In coursework, I had learned the value of authentic texts, dedicating time to reading - *really* reading, and valuing individual contributions to the learning environment. Yet, I was gearing up for a year when I would need to put all of that aside.

Leadership in the school had let me know that they were going to trust the “experts.” In meetings with the reading team and school leadership the spring prior, it was clear that teachers’ opinions were not valued. The decisions had already been made - meetings were simply to inform us of the shifts, as well as a chance to have an elementary Reading First coach from the district tout why the programs were so fabulous. They were not intended for dialogue considering whether the changes were really in the best interest of the students. One of the reading teachers ended up shifting to a different position within the school as she knew she would not want to be in her current position anymore given the upcoming shifts.

When I did bring up my concerns, my supervisor provided me with a scenario asking if one of my daughters needed a vital surgery who would I trust - a young enthusiastic surgeon who probably had a lot of great ideas or a seasoned surgeon who had a demonstrated record of success. Needless to say, with her metaphor I wasn’t the older surgeon, and as such, I did not have enough credibility to make decisions about something as vital as the literacy needs of students. One major obstacle to gaining my buy-in with this metaphor was that the “seasoned surgeons” she valued did not align with who I saw as the “big names” in my fields of literacy and language learners. They had not established a strong enough base of why I should trust what they were claiming about these programs working for students.

School and district leaders trusted in others, mainly those who touted the value of “research-based” scripted instruction programs approved for use in Reading First schools at the lower grades. It seemed they blindly accepted the programs aligned with the Reading First initiative and the research the publishers provided as the solution.

Leadership was determined that rolling up the Reading First programs to the middle school was the route to go. They had already spread from the district's two Reading First elementary schools to all five of them. From their perspective, continuing on at the middle school level was the natural next step when considering consistency for students and reaping the maximum benefit of the programs introduced in earlier grades.

The proposed programs challenged my philosophy of literacy that coursework had shaped. Yet, I realized that it was only my third year teaching. I had a lot of theory and some experience but did not yet have enough to foster the confidence to know for sure that the theory translated into practice. What if the school leadership was right? What if the scripted program was just what my 6th graders classified as struggling readers needed? I did not want my stubbornness against the program to prevent them from receiving what they needed, if that really was the case. I was torn. I wanted what was best for my students but was reluctant to believe that the box of scripted program materials would hold the secret to success. If it was really that easy, would there be as many discussions about meeting the needs of struggling adolescent readers?

Standing in my quiet room in preparation for the new school year I was hoping I would still have a reason to utilize the document camera while teaching, but looking at the mandated materials I could not justify having the brand new equipment. Instead, I boxed it up and sent out the email to staff seeing who would like to have it. The responses were rapid and it was bittersweet passing it on to an excited colleague. Throughout the year, I continued to box things up and ship them out - philosophies, beliefs, convictions. They just did not fit the script. Instead of implementing ideas into

practice, I thought about what I would do to respond to demonstrated needs *if* I was teaching in a school that allowed the flexibility to do so.

Training

I eagerly awaited the training at the start of the school year. I am the type of person who prefers to have time to plan, so I would rather have had the summer to review the scripted materials. However, my supervisor said that we would not receive training until the fall because they did not want to overload teachers in the spring. As such, the unknown loomed. The teacher days prior to the start of the school year are always packed. This year was particularly busy with literacy shifts that would impact the majority of the teachers, so multiple trainings were provided.

Unfortunately, the long-awaited day-long training was very poor. The whole morning consisted of an overview of all scripted direct instruction programs from SRA, unpacking all the materials that the school had received for Reading Mastery (instead of just showing us one of each as an example), and walking around the room and listening to the trainer explain all the components for each level, even though they were mainly the same for multiple levels.

After lunch, the trainer guided us through applying post-it notes to label different sections of the program guide. My frustration was building - what a waste of time! The sections were already outlined in the table of contents. When would I actually learn *how* to use this program that I would be teaching very soon? The trainer's reasoning was that we would be able to figure out the program but she wanted to get us organized so that we would know where to go when we needed help. However, for me, the post-it notes were cumbersome and it was not anything that the table of contents did not already tell me, so I

removed them once I left the training. Everyone has a different organizational style, and what I wanted to see was how to use the program.

Next, she showed us a video clip, but it was more of an advertisement for the program. We had already bought the program, so short marketing clips were not helpful either. Then, she modeled use of the program. I thought that finally I was going to get something useful out of the day, but that too ended up being another disappointment because she only modeled lower levels of the program that I would not be using and that were quite different. The publisher talks about Reading Mastery Classic as supporting learning to read while the higher levels, Reading Mastery Plus 3 and 4 helped students transition to reading to learn. As such, Reading Mastery Classic had a focus on decoding, and the program has “specially designed print to minimize visual confusion” (McGill, 2006). Thus, teachers have to familiarize themselves with the print to understand why, for example, the is featured as thē or little as little. In addition, there was a big emphasis on breaking words down before saying them “the fast way.” Because those were not components for the Plus versions, as the series transitions to regular print and the assumption that students have already “learned to read” by then, it was good general program background but not the most vital information I needed to know to get started. The trainer also had us look at student books from multiple levels to see how the program progresses.

Then the training was over. I left exasperated. I wanted to do a good job with the new program, but time was ticking, and there was not a whole lot of support to really understand how to maximize the instructional time with the program or to observe a master teacher. I headed back to my room ready to read through the introductory

information, the “rules” of how I would teach with fidelity and I familiarized myself with the scripts.

The Experience

I started the school year giving myself a pep talk. I tried to think positively that maybe I would surprise myself and see that the scripted reading program would help students grow as readers above and beyond my expectations based on what I had heard about the lack of research supporting the benefits of scripted instruction. I tried to deliver the lessons with enthusiasm, masking my feelings about the lessons. I was initially relieved that students did not automatically come in with distaste for the program that most of them would have experienced in elementary school. I was especially surprised in the case of students who were going back to the start of the book and re-doing previous lessons to accommodate the mixture of students.

Nonetheless, as the year progressed, my uneasiness about the program continued to build for a number of reasons. I could not help but analyze it as I went along, rather than just accepting it blindly as a dutiful district employee. I wondered if students would be able to transfer skills from such a controlled environment with authentic texts outside of the class. I worried about the message the program sent about reading by having unnatural components, such as having partner reads with a star exactly in the middle of the passage to notify readers to switch, even when it was right in the middle of a sentence. Coming from a perspective that reading is a meaning-making process, I would have expected a natural break close to the middle, rather than a formulaic exact middle.

The program also outlined that teachers should automatically correct all errors, but I struggled with that for a number of reasons: 1) I like to distinguish between miscues

that affect meaning and those that do not, 2) I like to allow time to see if the reader will self correct as that gives an important insight into the reader's process, and 3) I worry about the self-esteem of adolescents who are frequently corrected in front of their classmates.

I saw conflicts between different initiatives within the school. All teachers in the school were required to write content and language objectives on the board, as a layer of scaffolding for English Language Learners (part of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) framework). I had been trained in the SIOP and was confident in writing objectives; however, the scripted program clashed with the philosophy behind the intent of the SIOP. I knew that just because I wrote content and language objectives, it would not mean that I was better meeting my students' needs or that the SIOP was informing my instruction. Regardless, when I asked my supervisor about this, she told me that I needed to write my objectives, so I did. Every day there they were, but I knew I was not implementing the knowledge I had about ELLs in my lessons. The mandated script limited me to what the program creators valued.

Then there were the student comments from time to time, such as the time we switched to a new book and a girl asked whether the stories would be longer, adding, "If not, that will be really sad" (practicum journal, October 16, 2007). At another time, one boy stated, "Oh man, we're doing this thing again!" (practicum journal, October 3, 2007) as he flipped to a page on lesson 37 that restated questions about apple trees and forest trees that had initially been introduced back at lessons three and four.

I identified with the student's dismay, as I had flashbacks to undergraduate course texts explaining the audio-lingual method, where teachers act like "drill sergeants and

cheerleaders” and errors are pointed out and corrected immediately (Freeman and Freeman, 1998, pp. 11-12). I worried that this drill and kill would not lead to enduring memory of important concepts. Worse, I could not see a connection of how this program with so much repetition, rather than thinking, would support a life-long love of reading, nor how it would impact their overall improvement and effectiveness to be successful in high school and beyond.

One day as I took attendance while students came in and got their materials, one of the girls sat at the desk in front of the semi-circle of student desks where I kept the presentation guide. She wanted to play teacher and began reading from the script to her peers. I finished up taking attendance, put on a smile and continued with the day, but on the inside I felt sick. There was obviously something wrong when the students who were targeted as needing intervention were easily able to pick up the script and “teach it” based on familiarity with the program. Meeting the varied needs of adolescents just isn’t that simple.

In an email that I sent to a mentor in early October, I requested suggestions. The end of my email stated:

This week I took a personal day to observe the dual immersion program in our town and I loved it! I hope that my daughter gets in there and that I am able to teach there next year. If not I would seriously consider moving away from here. I couldn’t handle another year of scripted program, and I don’t want [my daughter] to be spending most of her elementary school in scripted reading and math with very little of anything else! (personal communication, October 4, 2007)

Thus, early in the year I developed strong feelings against the scripted program based on the clash with what I valued regarding the purpose of literacy and education. By the end of the school year, I was not swayed to believe the district rationale for the program as being “good for kids.” There were too many questions and hesitations.

Coincidentally, three of my substitute teachers during the fall were retired educators. They were dismayed by the program. A colleague mentioned that one, a previous administrator, retired because she did not agree with the move toward more and more scripted programs (practicum journal, October 2, 2007). When I had jury duty and returned back after partial days out, two of my substitute teachers gave their opinions as it was during a time when students were not in the room. One retired teacher indicated the same reason for her retirement. She included that she knew students need to be proficient in reading but that there was a better way to do it. She could see how it would not be so bad if it was only a couple of times per week, and I mentioned that students had to have it two times per day (October 9, 2007). The other retired teacher said that *Reading Mastery* did not fit well with her teaching style because she liked to be able to talk to students as they bring up connections, but with the program she realized quickly that she needed to stay on track and keep moving at a brisk pace (practicum journal, October 8, 2007).

Luckily, despite my reservations, not all students dreaded the program as much as I worried they would, such as one boy who said, “I’m going to miss this book” (practicum journal, October 16, 2007) as we switched to the next in the series. Nonetheless, there was still a strong dissonance between how I was expected to teach and what I was continuing to learn from reading endorsement classes and professional organizations that I could not ignore. The more I learned about my students and their

individual strengths and weaknesses, the more frustrated I was that I was not able to cater to their needs. Regardless of their interests and strengths, we all read the same texts, they all had to respond at the tap of my pencil, they all filled out the same workbook pages and tests that repeated questions over and over again, and they all read passages periodically trying to meet up to a certain rate expectation.

The restrictions of the mandated program did not allow me to integrate what I was learning from coursework that aligned with what I was learning about kids from teaching them. I have heard of many teachers who close their doors and do what is best for their students, but I also felt a loyalty to the district. At orientation, they had talked about employees' obligations to teach the curriculum the district mandates. I had never anticipated having to choose between loyalty to kids and loyalty to the district – I thought they would be complementary. Yet, I was encountering the complete opposite. Our visions were in stark contrast to each other.

I did not feel comfortable defying them, so I did not. I continued teaching the scripted instruction and tried to enjoy the time that I had with the students, encouraging them as readers. Thoughts of what I would have done if I had the flexibility, as well as what I could do to become a literacy leader to advocate for future change were frequently on my mind.

While I knew the instruction was not the best I could offer my students, I did not feel like I knew enough to create my own program that would meet all of their needs if I had been given complete freedom either, so I continued seeking resources to expand my understandings to support my students (Atwell, 2007; Beers, Probst, & Rief, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). While reading *Mosaic of Thought*, I realized that the collaborative

team they discussed was what an ideal professional school community would be like with deep discussions about students, research, and practice. Best of all, there was a sense that the teachers were meeting because they wanted to, because they were passionate about literacy, not because they had to or because they were being paid to do so.

Even though I would not know the words to describe what was happening until I started my doctoral program, early on I could tell that teaching in a context that valued programs over continually building teacher capacity in order to make professional decisions was not what I had gone to school for. Though I enjoyed my students, it was disillusioning to realize at the end of the day that despite what I was learning about my students and their literacy needs, I had very little flexibility to adapt instruction.

During the year, I closely connected to this excerpt reflecting the thoughts of a teacher in a similar position:

For Francisco these workshops proved to be especially frustrating, since the trainers promoted what they called “scientific research,” research he knew was flawed and not relevant to English language learners. Once school began, he quickly saw that he could not teach around themes, organize around centers, or engage his students in meaningful activities as he had done in the past. [...] He commented, “I hated what I was doing. I was not teaching. Someone taken off the street could follow the manual. I was not helping these kids at all.” (Freeman and Freeman, 2006, p. 6)

While I would not go as far as saying that I did not help my students at all, I struggled with not being able to teach in a way that would work toward fostering a love of reading in my students, to expose them to authentic literature, and to teach them effective reading

strategies. I wanted more freedom to tailor instruction to my students' individual needs and interests, rather than assuming that a one size fits all program was going to meet all the needs represented within the class. Some teachers love scripted programs, but I learned that I would not be content doing so for years (one year was quite enough).

I had the mindset that I would do the best job I could given the confines of the district and did provide leadership in order to make the implementation go more smoothly, but it was clear that it would not have been fulfilling to remain with the district. I did not like who I was as an educator, putting aside so much and depending on the script. Instead, I made the decision in the spring to accept a position at a local dual immersion charter school that was going to roll up to its first sixth grade class in the fall, a school where I would not have to box up my beliefs when it came to students and their needs.

Dear Julie,

A leveled reading program largely dictated by oral reading fluency did not work well for you. In some of the earliest conversations with your guardian she told me about your various medical issues. Your lung capacity was different than an average classmate, so she explained that it was harder for you to read out loud. When the time came for you to read timed passages it was so hard to watch you constantly trying but often not meeting up to the expectation. I voiced my concerns about the way the program did not account for such individual situations, but it did not change the structure of the program or the expectation that I was supposed to provide a uniform scripted program regardless of individual differences.

The sad thing is you weren't the only one who I felt this way about. There were others whose needs I could not meet to the best of my ability because of the restrictive environment of mandated scripted curriculum that I had to teach with "fidelity," leaving no room for real supplementation. I often remember one of your classmates who frequently made comments about his distaste for the program. Though I agreed he needed some additional support with reading, he was not going to improve as well in an environment where he felt patronized as he could have in a context that recognized the importance of attitudes toward reading.

Another of your classmates, like many in previous years, was upset that she was missing out on band in order to receive additional academic support. Her mom wanted answers as well about exactly what it was that she needed in order to grow as a reader. Sadly, the program and the literacy leadership at the school were not set up to provide true diagnostic reading assessments in order to closely examine needs. Instead, students were shuffled into available programs whether or not they were truly what students needed.

Yet another of your classmates ended up being moved into a lower level, not because she could not handle the content, but simply because different circumstances made it hard for her to keep up. I was okay with her not being able to complete all of the sections of assignments, but she was not. It increased her level of stress to the point that it seemed the other class was the better fit of the two, but it was not going to help her reach her full potential.

I could go on and on. My stomach clenched at the mention that if kids could not show good progress within the program, they would need to start over at a lower level

and work their way back up and eventually repeat the lessons again. The year left me thinking that there had to be something better. I wish that I could have seen a shift in practice that year, that my concerns could have demonstrated the need for a difference. However, the district believed in the programs, and I knew I did not have all the answers. I respected that they were doing what they thought would provide you and your classmates with the best opportunity to improve. And yet, it was still so frustrating.

My After / Their Before: Mariposa Charter from My Eyes

The following year I was quickly swept up in the whirlwind of teaching in a self-contained classroom for the first time. Stepping away from my year with a script, I moved to the alternate end of the spectrum when I transitioned to Mariposa Charter. The school valued teacher-created curriculum, aligned to state standards with very limited access and use of pre-packaged programs. I worked long hours, often at the school most of the day on Saturdays and Sundays, and still felt like I could never complete everything that I wanted to.

I was often drained. I reflected on the job demands of teaching in this context in contrast to teaching in the scripted context; yet, I always came back to the same idea. Having the ability to make decisions and respond to my students' needs made it all worth it. I would never trade being treated like a professional and all of the time-consuming responsibilities that come along with it for the comparatively easy job of teaching like a technician.

Through additional experiences with students and reading about literacy, I strengthened my convictions. Among them was the importance of having my students engage in authentic reading and writing, including making sure that students had ample

time to read and write, rather than spending the majority of their time completing workbook pages or test preparation worksheets. No Child Left Behind began when I was a sophomore in college, so the emphasis on standardized assessments has always been apparent in my teaching career. Over time I noticed that even in a position that so closely aligned to my personal teaching philosophy, the testing pressure was there.

We were not immune from the worries of whether or not the school would meet AYP each year because of the threat that we could lose autonomy if we didn't measure up according to the test. Yet, there was a strong commitment among staff and school leadership that our practice was firmly rooted in our teaching philosophies. As a school, we tried to weave in different components of test preparation in order to stay true to our core beliefs while also meeting AYP. We constantly reflected and reevaluated to make sure that we were not swaying too far in order to meet standardized tests. I tried to never do anything that would solely benefit performance on standardized testing. Instead, I wanted my class to change lives, to allow students to recognize the power of words, to foster engaging dialogues that prompt critical thinking and analysis of text that can then provide insights into their lives and the choices they make.

In my first years at the school, an aspect that continued to occupy my thoughts was related to reading support. Students were able to take the computerized state reading assessment up to three times throughout the school year in order to have multiple opportunities to demonstrate meeting or exceeding state expectations. In an attempt to better meet students' needs, in my first year the school started to implement small group pull-out instruction, often based on performance on earlier rounds of testing (or previous years).

I had mixed feelings. For two years of my career, I was the “pull-out” teacher, and I found myself experiencing that type of support from the lens of a mainstream classroom teacher. I noticed what they were missing and how their day was often fragmented. Considering what I learned from previous students and literacy leaders, I worried about the messages that the pull-out based on state assessment performance sent to students. I worried about whether the pull-out programs met each individual reader’s needs and whether those who met on state assessments were really engaged readers. I closely watched and observed, trying to consider the scenario from many perspectives.

Over time, I realized that I wanted the students in my classroom and that I was responsible to continue actively developing my understanding of students’ needs alongside my colleagues. Often my self-directed professional development was related to adolescent literacy, as well as considerations related to the dual immersion context. I voraciously read books, mainly from Heinemann and Stenhouse, while I also learned from and/or collaborated with other educators through blogging, the English Companion Ning, and professional organizations.

Prior to my second year, I advocated for push-in reading instruction as an alternative to pull-out; however, in doing so, I did not sufficiently outline what that would look like. Thus, multiple visions collided and it was essentially the same pull-out instruction just occurring in my classroom. It was no surprise when part way through the year students indicated that they would prefer to receive their instruction in the reading room. After all, push-in instruction in this manner was not reducing the stigma (in fact, it was shining a bigger spotlight on it), and it was not improving the fragmentation of their instruction.

The summer before my third year in the dual-immersion school, I began a curriculum and instruction doctoral program that led me to zoom back out from my focus on literacy to consider overall purposes of education and the historical context of education. I also had conversations that greatly impacted my resolve to once again advocate for push-in instruction, specifically focusing on voicing my vision and rationale. Just having students in my room was not enough, push-in instruction was so much more. The whole objective was to work collaboratively with the teacher who typically provided the pull-out services. The model had to recognize that all students can contribute to conversations about books in mixed-ability groups, rather than limiting access to reading materials for students targeted as needing intervention. I wanted all students to have voice and choice within a reading workshop context. Most of all, I wanted to make sure that instruction was opening access for what I later came to know as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991 as cited in Driscoll, 2005), rather than being marginalized and tracked by a testing score alone. I wanted to ensure that the layers of support intended to support students toward opening up avenues for realizing college aspirations would actually help students to move along that trajectory, rather than unintentionally moving them further and further from the mainstream content.

I was bound and determined, listing out my thoughts and learning from the prior year, that it was essential to clearly explain my theories to my director and the reading support teacher. However, before I had a chance to set up a meeting, I received an email from the reading support teacher. She was taking coursework toward her reading endorsement over the summer, prompting her to think about our literacy framework as well.

We met at a local coffee shop and had an invigorating meeting. Because of the fragmentation to students' days and the potential stigma and negative impact of grouping based on ability, as well as the varied needs of students who do not meet on state assessments, we decided that co-teaching would more closely align to both of our teaching philosophies. Talking and brainstorming about a joint vision of how we could work together to support students, rather than each planning exclusively, our energy and excitement rose.

We envisioned a set-up in which the students would view it as having two teachers during reading workshop, rather than viewing the support teacher as *only* being in the classroom for students who were targeted as needing more support. It was important that both of us interacted with all students in the classroom. We wanted students to recognize that there was much more to reading and forming a community of readers than placing worth and capacity to contribute as solely relying on a test score alone.

As teachers, we wanted to be cognizant that we needed to dig deeper and look below the surface of data to closely examine what needs the students actually had and then make instructional decisions accordingly, rather than grouping based on test scores. As such, we knew that being able to provide students with sufficient support in a push-in context would require us to do a lot of behind the scenes work in order to meet students' varied needs without drawing attention to whether or not students were viewed as needing more support in the classroom. We had already noticed negative impacts on students' self-confidence as readers when messages, albeit unintentionally, are sent about

their capabilities as readers when the test scores are viewed as *the* determining factor in determining the services they receive.

One obstacle that we had to consider was the question of languages. I rotated on a weekly basis between English and Spanish. Previously, students identified as needing pull-out instruction, continued to be pulled out during Spanish weeks in order to receive their pull-out services in English as the reading support teacher was not bilingual. We had to think carefully about how we would approach this piece. Our director had been adamant about wanting students to receive their additional support consistently every week, regardless of students missing out on their Spanish instruction. However, we decided that if she continued to work with targeted students during Spanish weeks, as she previously did with the pull-out model, it would defeat the whole rationale behind having push-in to minimize the blatant categorization based on test scores. Yet, we could not have her conferring with all students in English, as it would threaten the integrity of our Spanish immersion instruction. We concluded that by working together toward common goals and frequently meeting to discuss individualized focuses to support students that it would be perhaps more effective than students receiving weekly pull-out services in English and a partial language arts block with me in an uncoordinated fragmented way (Google Doc to capture our vision prior to proposing, July 28, 2010).

Shortly after, we met with our director to share our thoughts. In preparation, I typed up our vision, including the rationale and what the model would look like in a Google Doc that I shared with my colleague to confirm that it reflected what we had discussed. We both shared with our director through our lenses of why we did not think that the pull-out model was the best option for our students and outlined why our

proposed model would address those concerns. We had anticipated questions that our director might have. We had two years of observation and reflection with the same students to share and were able to explain specific students who we felt we were missing based on the previous model. We outlined how our proposed model would work toward reversing those detrimental trends. Based on our discussion, our director gave us permission to pilot push-in support as an alternative to pull-out.

Throughout the year, we met to plan and discuss our new venture. Supporting each other and having deep conversations about data, philosophies, and individual student needs, we were both satisfied in knowing that we were truly providing the best that we could for our students. Most importantly, we were able to respond to what we observed about them as individual readers, including their abilities, interests, and attitudes. We watched and considered how we could continually learn and discover.

Examining Experience through the Lens of the Questions

My narratives of experience provided a lens through which I could examine my first two research questions about the impact of policy and the role of others who have played a role in shaping me as a literacy leader. Through analyzing my narratives, trends emerged from my experiences.

Revisiting the Questions: Impact of Policy

My first research question was: How has policy impacted me as a literacy teacher and the decisions I make, as well as the pressure I feel, with regards to reading programs? By considering my first six years of teaching through this lens, I noticed three main trends. First, it was vital to realize the impact of the overall culture of the district or the

school with regards to the approach toward addressing accountability related policy. Second, through the process of analyzing and reflecting on the effectiveness and impact of programs intended to support students, tensions often arise. Finally, I noticed a theme of what sustained me as a professional during my first six years.

School/District Approach to Accountability-Related Policy

In my undergraduate bilingual education coursework, as well as my Master's in Teacher Education classes, the concept of student-centered versus teacher-centered learning was a frequent topic; however, I do not remember an emphasis on teachers as professionals versus teachers as technicians. In my first years of teaching, I encountered this contrast, noticing that my first district and Mariposa Charter focused on a value for teacher's voices and the knowledge that they could bring to the table. I gained this sense from my first district with the original interaction that I had with one of the administrators at a career fair, and consistently noticed it manifest from the school and district level throughout my year working for the district. In contrast, the culture of Murray School District valued teachers carrying out the district's mission, even if it did not align with what we learned from students or knew from research. In my case, this meant that I would teach the programs they had selected without questioning.

As a first-year teacher, my administrators valued my input more than my second school district when I had slightly more experience. Thus, when I accepted a position for Mariposa Charter in the same community as my second school district, I was relieved to be back in a setting where I could make professional decisions and implement what I was learning about students into practice without compromising my strongest values related to democratic education and thoughtful literacy.

Consistencies among all of the districts in which I worked were similar demographics and an emphasis on Annual Yearly Progress and other related No Child Left Behind mandates. Thus, treating teachers as technicians was not the automatic response of schools with enough students to be held accountable for specific sub-categories that are traditionally labeled as at risk. Rather, professionalism is an option as well.

Tensions

Though educational communities respond differently, the pressure of accountability-based systems and looming consequences prompts school communities to consider a range of possibilities, often resulting in scenarios where tensions between research and practice arise. From a teacher perspective, sometimes those tensions are relatively small, while other times they are blatantly different without welcomed avenues to discuss related concerns, as was the case while working at Murray Middle School the second year with mandated scripted instruction.

Most notably was the clash between the underlying definition of literacy and how literacy works. While I valued thoughtful literacy and reading as a meaning making process, rote memorization and drilling pervaded the scripted program. Aside from clashes between my personal beliefs and a district mandated program, I also noticed tensions between initiatives within the district, as mentioned with leadership expecting me to go through the motions of writing content and language objectives even when what I was doing in the classroom was so disconnected from the intent of the SIOP. Differences between expectations and philosophy led to an additional layer of tension in the form of considering loyalty to the school district versus loyalty to the students in my

classroom. With each compromise I had to make, it felt like I was letting my students down.

Sustainability of Professional Drive

In an educational context in which accountability-based policies are prevalent, it is natural that teachers have to navigate tensions that arise. By examining my own career, I realized that the extent to which school and district cultures welcome input from teachers impacts the sustainability of professional drive and motivation to continue in the profession. When the Murray School District leadership required that I deliver scripted instruction for my adolescent readers without first establishing a rationale of why the program creators were authorities in the field and without being able to see what I valued about literacy in the mandated instruction, I felt trapped.

I wanted to be able to genuinely feel like I really believed in the work that I was doing, rather than putting on a smile to mask my true feelings. Rather than feeling empowered by learning more, my frustration built. At one point I even brought up to my supervisor that I felt like the school district was paying for me to complete reading endorsement coursework in order to be highly qualified on paper as required but that I was not able to utilize any of my learning as a result of the process in order to impact my students. I felt a similar lack of agency with the knowledge gained through self-selected professional development books related to adolescent literacy. Had I not had a previous experience with another district in which I learned that culture of valuing educators as professionals, I may have left the profession.

Nonetheless, even in professional communities, accountability-based mandates have a draining effect. Through my narratives, I started to notice themes of what has

sustained me as a professional and made me want to stay in the field. At the heart of feeling energized and motivated as a professional is getting to know students as individuals and the sense that I can make a difference in their lives. Approaching the contexts with an inquiry stance, deep thinking is energizing and fulfilling.

This is only possible through being able to provide the best instruction I am capable of providing. A mandated scripted instruction that deprofessionalized me did not allow me to do so. Worse, my supervisor did not even validate my concerns but instead dismissed me as being too new to teaching to know what my students needed. Instead she trusted that someone who had never met my students was able to plan a one-size-fits-all program to best meet their needs. The complexity of adolescent literacy requires a lot more than simple solutions.

Recognizing that it is necessary for teachers to apply their knowledge about teaching and learning in order to tailor instruction to individualized contexts highlights the nature of education as an on-going challenge to figure out what will make an impact on students. It is vital to be able to engage in continual reflection and evaluation of practice with the flexibility to make adjustments.

Whether it was talking with my first administrator at the job fair about what I would do to help adolescents labeled as struggling readers, creating a vision for what our reading program could be at Mariposa Charter with a colleague, or learning along-side bloggers, conversations have always been powerful. Having the opportunity to notice challenges and then dialogue with colleagues in a problem solving nature sparks an on-going inquiry, recognizing that there is always more to learn and avenues to improve.

Thus, professional cultures that allow teachers to critically examine effectiveness of practice and to be responsive to students as individuals is what has sustained my motivation and drive in the field. This concept is inextricably linked to my second question regarding guiding voices, as I discovered that voices that I value go hand-in-hand with voices that recognize the importance of the role of teachers as professionals. As a result, all of the trends that I discuss in the next section link back to professional drive.

Revisiting the Questions: Guiding Voices

My second question was: Which voices have guided, and continue to guide me, in the midst of an accountability-based landscape while building the capacity to be an effective literacy leader? While analyzing my narratives, I discovered that various factors influenced the construction of my identity as a literacy leader. When considering what has sustained me as a professional, one theme that emerged was the sense that curiosity and challenges fuel on-going inquiry as professionals. In order to meet the needs of individual and collective challenges, I considered how on-going reflection prompted by coursework, students, and on-going professional development has influenced my construction of identity. Through continual examination of challenges and learning, I strengthened my convictions about my vision for literacy education, as well as the rationale behind it.

On-Going Learning: Coursework

Formal coursework has played a vital role in my formation as a literacy leader, including requirements for a reading endorsement, a summer exchange to Mexico for

educators, and my doctoral courses. Maintaining ties with universities allowed me to stay connected to the overall context of education in the United States and to consider multiple perspectives, rather than narrowing down to the prevalent viewpoints and lenses of education within my individual schools. University professors have also provided an invaluable mentorship in navigating experiences, whether it was to process tensions that arose or to provide feedback related to meeting the needs of specific students in contextualized situations. In addition, professors often reference current research and support to be a critical consumer of research. I often wonder who I would have ended up being as an educator if I had not had this access to the bigger picture of the world of education beyond the individual contexts of my schools.

On-Going Learning: Students

Over time students have always played a powerful role in shaping the way that I view my role as an educator, prompting me to consider what the implementation of initiatives feels like from their perspectives. For example, student feedback and comments provided insights into what it felt like to be labeled as at-risk adolescents. I also learned about their unique differences. Most importantly, students have taught me that quantitative data or program placement tests alone do not provide enough information to make decisions about them. Instead, it is necessary to consider potential scenarios that lead to data providing inaccurate representations of students. It is also essential to get to know students' backgrounds and motivations, collecting a wide-range of data along the way. Additionally, understanding students is not as simple as observing their outward behaviors. As teachers, we have to dig deeper in order to understand factors that have and continue to influence students' behaviors and learning.

Getting to know individual students has provided me with portraits of possibilities. I found myself remembering Rogelio, Susana, Julie, and other students from my earliest years of teaching while getting to know my students at Mariposa Charter. While I know that I will never have an exact replica of Rogelio again, what I learned about him provides me with an opportunity to consider whether his characteristics apply to other students, facilitating an understanding of where some puzzle pieces fit. On the other hand, it is also possible that what might initially appear to be the correct piece will end up not quite being right, in which case, I continue to search for understanding. Thus, previous experiences facilitate the recognition of patterns, providing a lens from which educators can view current contexts.

On-Going Learning: Professional Development and Dialogue

Often professional development is linked to services that schools and districts provide for teachers; however, my experiences have lead me to view professional development as being embedded in the day-to-day lives of teachers. Continual reflection and analysis of practice coupled with a consideration of which resources are available to support areas of inquiry are unequivocally a powerful means for professional development. Thus, formal professional development that my schools have facilitated for staff has impacted my development as a teacher, but more importantly has been the network of professional dialogues to keep self-identified areas for growth based on reflective practice at the forefront of my mind.

Face-to-face dialogues with other professionals have been highly beneficial. At times this entails single, isolated conversations, such as conversations with substitute teachers providing their thoughts on scripted instruction. Other times they are sustained,

on-going conversations, such as collaborations with my team teaching colleague at Mariposa Charter.

Another key component has been self-selected professional books, especially those that are written from the practitioner researcher stance with a conversational voice. These books have illuminated my own experiences, assisting in better understanding my students and self as a teacher. Texts have provided an avenue to make sense of the tensions that arose in my career, while also opening my eyes to new possibilities.

Web 2.0 tools have provided a powerful layer by allowing teachers the opportunity to extend the transactional text to reader experience with the possibility to continue the conversation with others. By blogging and participating in on-line forums, I have discussed ideas with other educators, as well as interacted with authors of books that have been influential in my career. As a rural educator, this has opened up possibilities such as gaining insights from teachers across the United States who are also implementing workshop philosophy or catching glimpses into the latest learning from Colombia's Teachers College Reading and Writing Project opportunities from educators geographically close enough to attend regularly.

Vision and Rationale for Literacy Education

On-going reflection and interactions with students and other educators has allowed me to examine my assumptions and those of others through the lens of what I have learned about individual students within my classrooms. Each additional year has provided experiences that strengthen my vision for literacy education, as well as the rationale for what I advocate. Core to my vision is the focus on the big picture and what we want for our students long-term, rather than focusing on simply working toward

students meeting expectations on standardized assessments. The purpose of education cannot be narrowed to test scores.

Through my experiences, I have learned the importance of articulating visions as strength of implementation makes all the difference. It is also necessary to consider what could undermine what we most highly value in education. When considering the effectiveness of a program, we always have to consider whether something that could be viewed as ineffective really is or whether the implementation was weak. Because of the importance of student voices, our rationales for practice should be grounded in a combination of theory, research, and insights we gain from students.

My After / Their Before: Mariposa Charter from Their Eyes

Educational opportunities are for the benefit of students, and as such, we cannot ignore the impact that our actions have on them when considering level of effectiveness. Throughout the three years with the students at Mariposa Charter, I have many memories of them - their varied levels of interest and reading abilities, their preferences, and the energy and laughter in the room while sharing about books. After dedicating countless hours to learning from my students during everyday classroom interactions and from other educators about literacy instruction, I was excited to have interviews with my students to learn more from their perspectives, wondering what their thoughts and opinions would be about various aspects of reading instruction.

Knowing that I make instructional decisions with students' interests in mind, it was important to hear their perspectives and to see what they thought about various components in the classroom or decisions that I had made. Their voices, such as informal comments they made or written reflections, had already impacted my decision making

process along the way; however, I knew that I could still gain a lot of insights from their commentaries. I anticipated either validation of decisions or comments that would prompt me to reconsider or re-analyze. I wanted to know what mattered to my students with regards to reading instruction.

In the days prior to starting their freshman year, students returned to Mariposa Charter to participate in individual interviews about themselves as readers and their experiences in 6th through 8th grade guided by the interview questions/prompts that I had created (see Appendix A). Upon analyzing the data, I noticed a trend on the emphasis of the sense of the community of readers within the classroom. I specifically considered three complementary categories: the social, choice and identity construction, and community. In addition, I considered their responses to a question about push-in instruction.

Regular Classroom Components

In order to better contextualize some of the student responses and data, the following is additional background about the classroom, as well as an explanation of some of the regular components. I made instructional decisions based on a background in language learning and literacy. Though students read in both English and Spanish every year, the classroom library, public library, and book stores provided access to more books and a wider variety in English.

In their sixth and eighth grade years, the students read one whole class novel. During their 6th grade year, students had 30 minutes of Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) daily, a mandated school-wide requirement. I read aloud from a novel on a daily basis and integrated reading into content area instruction. Students also participated in book

clubs. I requested permission to switch to independent reading with conferring and book clubs, rather than SSR before their seventh grade year in order to maximize a more limited amount of class time.

Their 7th and 8th grade years I taught in a reading workshop context, including mini-lessons, independent reading with conferring, book club meetings, book talks, responses to reading through reading response letters or blog posts, and time to share about the books they were reading with classmates. I continued to read aloud to them daily during their 7th grade year; however, with a decreased amount of time and challenges with maintaining momentum in a dual immersion model switching languages on a weekly basis, I did not regularly read aloud to them daily during the majority of 8th grade.

Read Aloud

For read alouds, I selected novels that I thought would have wide-appeal for the individual class, and was able to tailor decisions to the group over time as I got to know them more. Students sat on the carpet while I read and had a chance to share their reactions to the books, as well as request clarification. For continuity, I often tried to find books that were available in both English and Spanish so that I could continue on, regardless of the language. Nonetheless, at times there were books in English that I really wanted to read, and as such, there were also occasions in which I had a read aloud book for each language and there were week-long gaps in between readings. In such cases, there was more discussion to jog everyone's memory before continuing on with the novel.

From time to time, I would have students draw an image that stood out to them from the reading or do a written response about a certain aspect; however, more frequently, we simply read and discussed. I frequently referenced the common texts during focus lessons for reading strategies or for writer's workshop.

Focus Lessons

As a community of readers, we had whole-class discussions, typically at the carpet in order to discuss what readers do. Focus lessons addressed a range of topics, informed by state standards, professional reading, and what I noticed about my students as readers. As mentioned previously, I typically referenced back to common texts during focus lessons. Because the majority of the students were in the classroom with me for three years, our conversations often linked back to texts from the various years. At times, they brought up texts that they had previously read in their younger years as well.

Self-Selected Independent Reading and Conferencing

Whether it was through SSR in their 6th grade year, or for reader's workshop in 7th and 8th grade, students consistently had time to read during the school day. I brought in boxes of books to contribute to the classroom library that I had been building from the time I was student teaching. I continued to purchase and contribute books to the classroom library, specifically to fill gaps in genres, authors, or topics in which students demonstrated an interest.

In addition, the school provided me with a \$2000 book budget my first year because it was a new classroom and around \$100-300 the other years. Because we did not purchase core curriculum or workbooks for language arts, it was easier to prioritize

funding for classroom libraries. My push-in support co-teacher was also building a library in the reading room with personal and school funds. From time to time, she would take students over to the reading room or she would bring baskets of books over to the classroom with specific students in mind when they were either struggling to find a book or if in general she knew the books would be a perfect fit for students.

Other staff members in the school would also donate books to my classroom library from time to time. For example, if they bought books for their classroom library and then realized it was more appropriate for my grade levels or if they enjoyed reading YA novels, they would sometimes buy them and then pass them on for students to enjoy.

Communicating with students about books via avenues such as conferring and reading response letters was a core component of the class, providing an opportunity to have on-going discussions with students about books, as well as assessing their level of application of focus lesson topics. It was also a chance to gauge the level of interest and comprehension of self-selected texts.

Book Clubs

Periodically throughout the year, students had opportunities to participate in book clubs. Prior to starting clubs, I (and eventually the reading support teacher) would book talk the options. Students would then rank their preferences on a quarter sheet of scratch paper. When grouping students, we aimed for all students to be in their highest preferences when possible. We also considered how well the text would match to their reading abilities and interests, knowing that sometimes a challenging text might still be appropriate if it was high-interest. If a student really wanted to read a book that might have been too challenging to read independently, we made notes to provide more

scaffolding via interim conferences in between book club meetings. We also considered the strengths and perspectives that would impact group dynamics.

Students participated in both face-to-face book clubs and on-line book clubs. Over time, I realized that on-line book clubs were most appropriate for multi-age book clubs, as if all students were in the same class, they preferred to talk to each other in class about their books. At one point in their 8th grade year, while some of the students were state testing, the remaining students teamed up to facilitate book clubs with 6th and 7th graders. Teams of students selected one of their favorite book club books from which the younger students were able to choose.

Whole-Class Reads

Throughout the three years, we read two books as a whole class (aside from read alouds). In 6th grade, students read *Cuando Tía Lola vino de visita (a quedarse)* by Julia Álvarez in Spanish, and in 8th grade they read *We Beat the Streets* by the Three Doctors and Sharon Draper. We read in a variety of ways, including as a read-along, in small groups, in pairs, and independently. At times, students had a choice in how we would read.

We Beat the Streets was part of an overall unit in their 8th grade year focusing on the question “How do people respond to the events and decisions that shape their lives?” Students were prompted to consider the question in relation to their self-selected texts as well. During the unit, students reflected on their experiences at Mariposa Charter and looked ahead to goals for themselves as they moved on to the high school. We talked about how they could support each other by being aware of each others’ aspirations and providing positive peer pressure, just as the three doctors had for each other. Students did

a range of writing with the unit, including reflective writing and a chance for a self-selected genre (such as a personal narrative or a realistic fiction short story). They also presented “graduation speeches” to their classmates.

A Community of Readers

A section of the questions/prompts focused on specifically eliciting student perspective on the classroom and the instructional components that I had in place. I opened that section with two general questions: Were there any classroom activities that made you excited to read? Were there any classroom activities that did not make you excited to read? For each question, I prompted students to explain their responses if they identified something.

Table 3: General Responses Summary

	Excited	Not Excited
Book Clubs	Erika (specifically mentioned with younger kids) (personal communication, August 23, 2011) David Giovanni Lorena Nancy Renata	
No	Diego Emiliano	David Emiliano Esmerelda Erika Nancy Rocío

Not Sure/I can't remember	Daniel Esmerelda Miriam	Diego Miriam
Other	Rocío – Reading Response Letters (personal communication, August 23, 2011)	Daniel – “unless it was too hot” (personal communication, August 23, 2011) Giovanni – Book clubs if his selection did not end up capturing his attention because then he could not just switch (personal communication, November 21, 2011) Lorena – “Does math count?” (personal communication, August 22, 2011) Renata – Reading a specific book in Spanish that she did not understand well (personal communication, August 22, 2011)

Upon completion of the general questions, I proceeded to ask them about what they liked or did not like about specific aspects of the classroom (read alouds, choice, book clubs, and whole-class reads). Because the general questions only sparked discussion for some of the students, I realized that it had been vital to include the follow up questions, providing students with specific areas. Nonetheless, the general questions were still valuable in realizing that “book clubs” was the most frequent response when students did identify something specific (6 out of the 7 who provided a response), something that I had not anticipated – something that prompted a lot of thinking.

I expected some students, avid readers in particular, to highlight books that they connected to as a main emphasis of their interviews; however, I was surprised to find that while they briefly mentioned specific books, their thoughts were more focused on the social aspects of the classroom. References to interactions within the classroom immediately stood out to me; however, as the year progressed and I continued to think about the data and processed my thinking with others, I decided to return to the data again to recode. I decided to look more closely to see the types of interactions students mentioned, and realized that what I had initially considered as social would actually be better described as the sense of being part of a community of readers, broken down into three complementary sub-categories: the social, choice and identity construction, and community.

The Social

Their thoughts indicated the importance of experiences related to discussions about books. They mentioned a range of conversations, including those related to read alouds, whole class novels, and book clubs (both face to face and on-line). In addition, Rocío mentioned reading response letters (personal communication, August 23, 2011). When talking about conversations with classmates for book clubs, Lorena said, “I liked that a lot cause you can express what you liked about the book - you don’t have to keep it all inside and you’re just all waiting to tell someone about it” (personal communication, August 22, 2011). With her statement, I thought about my personal experiences as a reader, the delight in discovering the network of book bloggers in order to connect with other readers or my excitement over a colleague wanting to start a book club. Because of workshop philosophy, I am constantly focusing on whether the way I am setting up my

classroom aligns with what readers do in real-life outside of the classroom. Lorena's comment affirmed that allowing readers a chance to share their thoughts about what they are reading is a valuable real-life component to weave into the classroom.

Aside from expressing their own opinions, students also highlighted hearing others' perspectives. Erika mentioned, "I really liked book clubs with the younger kids – like to see what was going on in their heads was cool," and she also highlighted liking the whole class read because of "all of us reading the same story and hearing what everyone gets out of it" (personal communication, August 23, 2011). Emiliano's thoughts closely aligned, stating, "[...] then you get to compare the different things that everybody thought about it" (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Reading is transactional (Rosenblatt, 1994); each reader can bring a unique lens with which to consider the events. Based on the students' comments, it appears that they enjoyed gaining insights into a range of lenses. Esmerelda mentioned specifically appreciating book clubs, expressing a greater sense of comfort in the small group context, rather than a whole class scenario as with read-aloud or whole class read discussions (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

Choice and Identity Construction

Within every community are the individuals who influence each other in the identity construction process. Recognizing students as individuals, workshop contexts emphasize connecting students with books that will capture their interest. Although not all readers noted an increase in their level of interest toward reading or the amount of time spent reading during their middle school years, the majority did (10 out of 12).

Lorena said:

Around 7th grade I started liking books even more than I used to. Sixth grade I just thought it was blah, only geeks read. During my years of seventh grade and then eighth, I started liking it more and more. I think cause it made me happier. It brought me to another world that I can escape from this place and go to a different one that I was reading about, and it was just really fun. (personal communication, August 22, 2011)

Nancy, Diego, and Renata specifically mentioned a shift based on discovering and having access to books they liked (personal communication, August 22-23, 2011), as illustrated by Nancy's words, "I didn't actually start loving reading until the 6th grade, and I noticed I started reading for hours instead of just minutes like I was supposed to be. I just finally found a good book that I really liked" (personal communication, August 23, 2011). In a more restrictive environment, these students might not have discovered their interest in reading.

Miriam expressed an interest because of the reading and writing workshop overlap, as I encourage readers to notice certain aspects that they were focusing on as writers when they were reading. She described more closely considering whether or not books were capturing her attention, which increased her engagement (personal communication, November 22, 2011). Emiliano and Erika were the only two students who considered themselves as remaining about the same; however, it was for different reasons. Emiliano still did not view himself as enjoying reading, but Erika highlighted that her mom always surrounded her with books (personal communication, August 22-23, 2011).

When I later specifically asked students whether or not they liked being able to choose what they read, students affirmed the importance of choice in reading texts, especially based on varied interests in the classroom, something that did not surprise me. Students' thoughts highlighted different rationales for choice, but were all complementary. The following are representative statements of the range of comments:

- Referring to book clubs, Lorena said, "You get to choose your own books. It's not like, 'Here's your book; you read it now.' You get to choose your own, and I like doing that" (personal communication, August 22, 2011).
- Nancy stated, "I could find something I actually want to read instead of getting stuck with something" (personal communication, August 23, 2011), which also correlated with Miriam's comment, "[...] then it's something that I would wanna actually read and not be like, 'I don't want to read this. I don't like it.' You know, just dreading every single page you have to read" (personal communication, November 22, 2011).
- Emiliano viewed choice as an issue of equity, "Different people have different styles of reading, so it wouldn't really be fair that everyone has to read the same book" (personal communication, August 22, 2011).

While they usually made statements highlighting the value for them, Diego also mentioned that choice made it easier for me rather than trying to find texts that would capture all of their interests (personal communication, August 23, 2011). Although some students still considered book clubs as providing choice, Giovanni mentioned that it could still lead to a sense of being stuck if he ended up not liking the book (personal communication, November 21, 2011).

Inherent in their responses is the sense of understanding of the varied interests within the classroom. Through the class, students became familiar with each other's reading interests, and they recognized that something would be missing if there was not a layer of choice. Over time students were able to anticipate others' thoughts in discussions as well. Erika stated, "You know, we always had book clubs with our classmates, so I pretty much know everyone's opinion on different book genres, but it's still fun" (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

Their statements made me think back to book club configurations and how students would align with each other in some genres but not in others. For example, as a 6th grader Erika, along with other classmates, enjoyed Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series. One of her classmates expressed lament that there was not more romance involved; however, Erika declared that she liked it because of the lack of romance. Thus, Erika and her classmate knew that they would share many interests in books, but when it came to romance, Erika was not interested. As such, discussions about books were often fluid. Students recognized who in the class they should talk to about the latest book they loved. Nonetheless, students often tried to convince each other to read outside of their comfort genres, such as Giovanni finally taking a break from problem novels after Daniel frequently talked to him about the *Warriors* series.

Aside from constructing identity as individual readers within the overarching community, students also used books as a lens to consider individuals within the classroom. At one point in the year, my push-in co-teacher allowed a group of students from her *Stargirl* book club to go to the reading room during lunch to plan out the dramatization of some scenes from *Stargirl*. In her interview, Renata reflected on the

group asking her to join, stating, “[...] everybody voted for me to be Stargirl, so I’m like okay, I’ll be Stargirl, so it’s like I was kind of a Stargirl here” (personal communication, August 22, 2011). She even agreed to surprise one unsuspecting birthday boy in the middle of the cafeteria one day, ukulele in hand, to sing him Happy Birthday.

Her comments made me think of other instances in which students used books as a lens to reflect on their own lives. Another example that came to mind was a group of boys discussing how they would respond to having to go to war while reading a historical fiction set during the Vietnam War. Lorena mentioned that reading Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Wintergirls* made her realize why she would never want to be anorexic or bulimic (personal communication, August 22, 2011). Erika reflected on how in contrast to Melinda’s response in Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*, she would have talked to her parents (personal communication, August 23, 2011). As such, books became a vehicle to allow students to consider their own lives and identities.

Community

A third theme that emerged in the students’ responses was a sense of community. Mariposa Charter emphasizes community throughout the K-8 program, so the school-wide culture supported the sense of community within my classroom. It is important to note that the sense of community, much like the social, was not explicit in the questions as choice was, but it was something that emerged from student responses about regular classroom components. The words *everybody* and *together* came up repeatedly in interviews, such as Esmerelda’s rationale for liking read alouds, “[...] everybody got together and you just read us a story” (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

Largely, the sense of community linked back to supporting each other and working collaboratively. David mentioned collaborating and the reciprocal nature of interactions multiple times, including the following statement, “You actually got to interact with other kids and you helped them, and they helped you. It was a group thing. If you didn’t know something or understand something, you would ask your groupmate” (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

Students also mentioned support they received from peers to notice aspects that did not initially catch their attention while reading. Of the whole class read in 8th grade, Diego said:

We would go back to the whole discussion that everybody is having. Then you remember stuff from the book that you have read. Then, sometimes I, when I was reading, I couldn’t remember the stuff that they were talking about, so I would have to go back and read. (personal communication, August 23, 2011)

Thus, having a chance to see the book through classmates’ eyes extended the depth in which students analyzed the text.

While students all mentioned that they liked choice, they also had positive experiences with the shared texts because of the opportunities to experience being a part of a community of readers, as was highlighted in the social category. With book clubs, students still had limited choice, but I determined whole-class reads. Selecting books that would appeal to the range of readers within the classroom was vital, and once that layer was in place, students indicated that they enjoyed the experience of reading and discussing together as a class. Of the more recent shared text in 8th grade, Renata stated:

I think it was really fun. Everybody's like, 'Oh my gosh, I love it,' and I really thought that everyone's into the book. You know some boys didn't like to read, and I'm like, 'Wow you really like to read now, and everybody's reading.' They started talking about it and started getting excited about it, and they all read it.

(personal communication, August 22, 2011)

In this instance, the hook for the group seemed to be a high-interest book coupled with discussions about the upcoming transition in their lives to high school. Daniel talked about how the same experience prompted him to read a book that one of his friends had been trying to get him to read for a long time. He said, "[...] maybe you don't want to read that book but your friend keeps telling you so you guys can talk about it, but then the whole class reads it together and you guys can all talk about that one" (personal communication, August 23, 2011). As such, common texts aided in developing a sense of community, a shared experience.

Push-In Instruction

The interview questions only had one question related to push-in instruction, "What did you think about having two teachers in the classroom during reading time?" For students who had previously been with the teacher for pull-out instruction, I also asked about their thoughts about meeting in small groups in the reading room, and then asked them which they would prefer of the two.

Originally, I walked away from the interviews and considered that their responses did not provide me much insight into our decision to have push-in support. Four students had indifferent responses, such as Emiliano responding to what he thought about it by saying, "I didn't really" (personal communication, August 22, 2011) or Daniel saying,

“Um, I don’t know – I didn’t really pay attention to it” (personal communication, August 23, 2011) or Giovanni stating, “It was weird. I don’t know. It’s just. It really didn’t matter” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Along the same lines, Erika replied, “Yeah, I wasn’t sure if she was just going to come up and grill me on my book to make sure I was actually reading, but I never really knew what that was for, but I guess I didn’t mind it” (personal communication, August 23, 2011). Nonetheless, upon further consideration, I realized that indifference to the push-in model was not necessarily a negative. As a team, we had worked hard to present it as co-teaching and that both teachers worked with all students so that it would not seem like certain students, with certain test scores, were receiving something other than those who did meet on state assessments. In which case, the indifference may be an indication that we accomplished our purpose. They might not have thought a lot about it because we were able to seamlessly integrate the co-teacher into the classroom.

Other students did highlight advantages; however, they too confirmed the purpose of a smooth integration as the comments pointed toward efficiency, rather than providing something all together different. Esmerelda, Lorena, Miriam, and Nancy talked about having two teachers meant students did not have to wait as long to interact (personal communication, August 22-23 and November 22, 2011). Nancy said, “It was good because you’d get a chance to talk to one of the teachers at least” (personal communication, August 23, 2011). It took Miriam a little bit to gather her thoughts. She said, “Uh, I think, yeah. I’m thinking. I’m thinking” before discussing the advantage of being able to have multiple group conversations each with a teacher, rather than me going back and forth between two groups (personal communication, November 21, 2011). I

thought about the students who were indifferent and wondered about whether they would have agreed with these statements but just needed more time to think about it. This would have applied to both one-on-one conferring and book club meetings. Diego also highlighted the conferring, a part of the regular workshop routine, with my co-teacher (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

As was present in various points in David's interview, he once again brought up collaboration, stating, "That actually made me feel better because if I didn't learn something from someone, I could go ask the other teacher, or if they didn't know, then they could work together and we'd all get together and help each other" (personal communication, August 23, 2011). It appears that the push-in model, having two teachers in the room, provided David with a heightened sense of security that his needs would be addressed.

When I asked the few students who had received both pull-out and push-in support which they would prefer, Esmerelda did mention that she preferred pull-out because of the small group setting (personal communication, August 23, 2011). As previously stated, she also mentioned an appreciation of book club discussions, in contrast to whole group discussions. It appears that in general, she tended to select the smaller group option when available.

David responded that he would prefer to stay in the classroom; however, his response of saying that he wouldn't "have to do that much walking" (personal communication, August 23, 2011) did not necessarily provide me with a strong rationale to provide insights between the two. When I prompted to see if there were any other reasons for his preference for staying in the classroom, he said, "I can just walk to the

table and get that reading and go right back to what I was doing before” (personal communication, August 23, 2011). That response made me think about the instructional time that is saved by having the extra support teacher come to us instead of students going to her. Not only do they save time from transitioning to the building next door where the reading room is located, but they also saved time by having us work together to provide the same instruction, rather than having students switch gears to a separate instruction with her mid-way through my class.

I found Diego’s response to be the most thought provoking, as he had been one of the students that we were most concerned about the pull-out model being detrimental to his self-concept as a reader. When asked about reading groups outside of the classroom, he explained that it was easy to concentrate because the room was quiet with no noise. The reading room is one of the only rooms in the school that has doors, blocking out more of the sound. However, when I asked him if there were advantages to having the reading support teacher in our classroom, he said, “Over here, like just that we’re here like everybody. We were here together with everybody” (personal communication, August 23, 2011). The themes of the community were coming through as he tried to process his thoughts. When I restated that he noted advantages to both options and asked which he would prefer if given a choice, he said to stay in the classroom, explaining, “I don’t know cause you would be with everybody, all your friends and you can be reading together. You can see everybody that’s reading” (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

While the limited attention to push-in instruction in the interviews did not provide enough data to make sweeping claims about its effectiveness, I thought that it did provide

some encouragement that students found the collaboration as being meaningful. And yet, it is vital to honor Esmerelda's voice of preferring small groups. I reflected on the need to carefully balance preferences of individual students. One potential means to support students like Esmerelda within the push-in model would be to intentionally provide sufficient opportunities to interact in small groups within the classroom.

Because the bulk of students either did not really think about having two teachers or thought about efficiency, I thought about implications while moving forward with the push-in model. Based on students' voices, we can carefully consider insights based on their comments about what they find as beneficial in supporting a community of readers. Then we can maximize it by having two teachers who are able to get to know individual students and groups of students more so than one teacher alone would be able to do.

Conclusions

Interview after interview it started to strike me that reading communities mattered for these students. As I revisited the data to re-code, I realized that within that general concept, there were sub-categories. As someone dedicated to fostering a sense of life-long reading, it was fascinating to hear their perspectives. I realized that while connecting students to books and providing time to read was essential, equally important was providing a framework for students to frequently discuss and interact about their books. I recognized the role of these discussions in scaffolding construction of identity as a reader. I thought back to class experiences when students would laugh at other students swooning about male characters in romances or to students talking to me in the hallways about the latest book they were reading. At the time, I did not necessarily realize how essential these everyday interactions were. Discussions, choice, and the sense of

community related to books resonated so much with students. As I concluded interviews, I wondered how often they would have opportunities to do so in their high school placements.

Their After

Preparing for the Transition

Spring of the school's first year with an 8th grade class approached, and I was ready to celebrate the students I had taught for three years. Students were gearing up to transition into community high schools, mainly to the only high school in the same district in which I had taught scripted instruction, with the exception of one student who would attend Rhine High School in her hometown within the county.

A couple of high school faculty came to my classroom to administer language arts placement tests for all who would be attending the high school. I was anxious, wondering exactly what aspects they would value. I remembered back to the words correct per minute and the program assessment data that dictated placements when I was at the middle school. I knew there would be potential clashes once again between what I valued in a literacy program and how my students would be judged.

The test did end up being exclusively a program assessment for *Lanugage!: The Comprehensive Literacy Program*. Once students were settled in and had begun testing, I was able to look at one of the test booklets. The first page had a maze selection (a cloze passage with multiple choice options to fill in the blanks), as did the second, and the third... With horror I arrived at the end of the booklet and realized that essentially, a booklet of maze passages would determine their 9th grade language arts placement.

As some students finished up, a high school counselor scored them and showed me how they were doing. According to their scores, most were placing in the program. She showed me three students who would be at level C. I expressed dismay that they were very different students with varying needs. She let me know that they would monitor initial progress and regroup with some moving through the program at a quicker pace. Once everyone completed the assessment, all except two were placed into the program, albeit some were in the highest level and the counselor said they might just be in the program for a semester.

I pointed to a group of student placements and brought up that they were avid readers that had consistently met or exceeded on their state assessments for at least the past three years. I asked if they would be considering anything else. I was starting to panic, as I could see the tracking process beginning all over again. It was the whole reason I wanted to leave my position at the district, and yet, my students were heading right into that same system.

The counselor let me know that they would consider the state reading assessment and also had me write down some quick anecdotal notes about their writing abilities. However, it sounded like students would be in those placements. Based on the conversation with the counselor, after the first year of implementation, the school was hopeful about its impact. I was not so hopeful. I saw it as the continuation of the process that took place at the middle school while I was there - rolling up scripted, one-size-fits-all programs.

I worried about the scenario I had heard frequently of teachers mentioning in books and on blogs about students moving from middle school workshop classrooms

reading frequently to high schools that did not provide time for reading books. For example, Atwell (2007) stated:

Now, when I run into them, I've learned not to ask, "So, what are you reading?" Not the girl who read 124 books during eighth grade. Not the boy who read every dystopian science-fiction novel I could lay hands on, from *The House of the Scorpion* and *After*, to *Brave New World*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *1984*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Not his friend who enrolled in CTL at age twelve, never having chosen or read a novel on his own, who graduated with sixty-four titles he loved under his belt. I don't ask them because most of the time I already know the answer, and it kills me: "Nothing. I can't. The assignments for freshman English eat all my time." (pp. 106-107)

Atwell (2007) continues to explain that her students go to a range of high schools, but "Wherever they end up, most of them put pleasure reading on *pause* for four years, because they want to pass high school English" (p. 107). Then, she writes a plea for colleagues that are English teachers to rethink the critical phase of students' lives as adolescents on the cusp of adulthood and the power in which books and discussions can play in their development.

Similarly, in her book *Literacies Lost: When Students Move from A Progressive Middle School to a Traditional High School*, Cyrene Wells (1996) explores her two-year research of being immersed with a group of students for their 8th grade year and then transitioning with them to their high school for their 9th grade year. As the title indicates, she reflects on and provides observations between expectations and values at the two schools, including their process of reorienting to their new context.

I also thought of Donalyn Miller's (2009) *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*, and her description of igniting or sustaining a passion of reading in her 6th graders but then having students return as 7th graders dismayed that their teacher did not provide time for self-selected reading. Her students also highlighted assumptions their new teacher had about them not reading enough and seeing it as her goal to get them to read more. I wondered about the assumptions that teachers at the high school would make about my students based on the data that they would receive, their state test scores and the placement tests. I also worried that my students would be like some of my former students, dreading class or feeling like the program was demeaning.

Throughout the summer many ideas tossed around in my head. What if it was so different that they thought I did not prepare them? Toward the end of the summer when I had a chance to see many of the students shortly before school was starting, I started to wonder if they would even care about the differences. Students were excited and energetic for their next step, some already participating in fall sports. Would they care about the format of their language arts class?

I started looking on-line to find out more about *Language!*, knowing that I wanted to hear the philosophy behind it in order to get a better sense of what was awaiting my students. I found the publisher's site (Cambium Learning Group, n.d.) to learn background information about the program. Based on the description, the program is "for students who are more than two years below grade level [...] These students often represent three populations: English language learners, students with special needs, and 'instructional casualties.'" Further, the site outlined that it "provides research-validated, mastery-based, intensive reading and language arts intervention that targets non-readers,

struggling readers and English Learners in grades 3-12.” I cringed - “instructional casualties” based on a maze placement test. It seemed like pretty sweeping claims. My students did not fall into the category of being more than two years below grade level, also leading me to question the validity of the placement test.

Nonetheless, I continued looking. While I was concerned with the six steps “From Sound to Text in every lesson,” I also noticed that it talked about having a gradual release of responsibility, flexibility for differentiation and assessments that guide instruction. Thus, while there were some red flags, I also noticed that it also appeared to have some qualities that were potentially more closely aligned with promising practice than Reading Mastery.

I wanted to actually see the materials, so I visited the curriculum library at my university. As advertised, step 1, the phonemic awareness and phonics component was present in each lesson, even in the highest levels. I thought back to research about how that is not appropriate for many adolescents. It was not what any of my former students needed. There was also a strong presence of formulaic worksheets and exercises. Yet, there were glimmers of hope. The literature was actually authentic, and it appeared that the developers tried to tend to adolescent interests as well.

As I sat in the library sifting through the materials the question remained - What were they going to think? I considered the potential reactions students might have. I waited for students to have a chance to experience their first months at the high school before conducting follow-up interviews. Waiting and wondering, I caught glimpses from a variety of sources, such as a photo of a former student accompanying a newspaper article. Mostly, I saw parents in the community - at church, in the store, side-by-side at a

stop light, at the library, and at the school. Proud faces, beaming about their children's successes and interests at the high school. For the most part, kids were involved and they were enjoying their experiences.

Freshman Year Experiences

In the first round of interviews, students reflected on aspects of their 6th through 8th grade experiences that motivated them to read and that they enjoyed. Their responses linked back to a sense of a community of readers – discussions related to texts, choice and construction of identity of individuals within the class as readers, and the overall sense of community. While analyzing data from the second and third round of interviews (see Appendices B-C for questions/prompts), I considered the presence or lack of presence of these aspects. I also considered evidence of whether or not their language arts/reading instruction seemed to engage and motivate them as readers. However, first I provide background about their placements to provide context for the rest of the discussion.

Placements: General Information and Description

As I began conducting interviews, I realized that the high school must have indeed taken other factors into consideration while finalizing student placements as the students in the traditional English 9 classes were not limited to the original two students who did not place into *Language!* As the high school mentioned, there was also some fluidity in placements as students either experienced shifting levels or noticed their own groups being reconfigured throughout the year. The following table illustrates the

students' initial placements and shifts throughout the year. The table only includes the students who participated in the second and/or third rounds of interviews.

Table 4: Student Placements

Name	Semester 1	Semester 2
Murray High School		
Daniel	English 9 → <i>Language! C</i>	<i>Language!</i> Daniel expressed confusion about the level. He said that he moved up to level B, but I mentioned that B was a lower level. He mentioned that he really did not remember because he tore the cover off his work book, but that it was probably D because they moved up (personal communication, May 18, 2012).
David	<i>Language! C</i>	<i>Language! D</i>
Emiliano	<i>Language! C</i>	English 9
Giovanni	English 9	English 9
Diana	English 9	English 9
Miriam	English 9	English 9
Renata	<i>Language! D</i>	<i>Language! D</i>
Rhine High School		
Erika	Advanced English	Advanced English

Based on the conversation with the high school counselor the day of the *Language!* placement test, all of the participants attending Murray High School were going to be in *Language!* classes; however, as the table demonstrates, only three started out in *Language!* while four others started out in English 9. It appeared that state testing

data was probably a primary consideration; however, it was not an automatic exit from the *Language!* programs as one student who consistently met for at least her 6th-8th grade years was still placed into *Language! D*. Perhaps counselors shifted students who were going to be in the highest level and who had met grade level benchmarks as 8th graders into English 9, rather than having them stay in the *Language!* classes.

During the first semester the students in *Language!* classes had the course for a double block of time, whereas in the second semester two of the participants who remained in *Language!* classes shifted to one period tracks, while the third participant continued to be in a double block. The following descriptions based on student interviews about each of the course options and my limited observations provide insights into the values inherent in the placements.

Language! Classes

Language! classes at the high school have a blend of grade-levels, potentially having 9th-12th graders in any given class. When students are in double blocks of *Language!*, they receive one language arts credit and one elective credit (Murray High School teacher, personal communication, January 30, 2012). I had the opportunity to observe two *Language!* classes at the high school. The first was a half of a double block class. Because the class was not going to be doing their regularly scheduled *Language!* class in the second half, I switched over to a different classroom with a single block of *Language! D* for the second period. Both classrooms had the six *Language!* steps that I remembered from reviewing the curriculum materials at my university posted (phonemic awareness and phonics; word recognition and spelling; vocabulary and morphology; grammar and usage; listening and reading comprehension; and speaking and writing).

There was a deficit emphasis to the classes. In the first classroom, there was a paper posted under the white board that resembled a piece of cheese. Signs on both sides of the visual created a one-way dialogue about it divided into four sections that stated: “Why is there Swiss cheese on the wall? / The Swiss cheese represents your brain. Weird, right? / Nope. Your brain is missing tiny holes of language information. / *Language!* will help you fill in those holes!” (field notes, January 20, 2012). In the second classroom before students entered, the teacher talked about the challenges of teaching *Language!* as “working with kids that haven’t had to do anything for so long” (field notes, February 14, 2012). She mentioned that a big part of the class was teaching expectations, and when I asked whether she was referring to behavioral or academic expectations, she said both. She also noted, “anything higher level is a challenge” (field notes, February 14, 2012).

During the first class period, students completed a warm-up to combine two simple sentences into a compound sentence, such as: I like chocolate. I like suckers. Students also had to define independent clause and dependent clause or phrase. After the warm-up, the teacher led students through a series of review and tests, including topics such as hard and soft c and g; a spelling test with words such as circle, center, marriage, and surgeon; and filling in either an attribute or a characteristic, depending on which was missing, such as _____:yellow could be sun.

After each section, students switched with a partner to correct each others’ tests. Though none of my former Mariposa students were in this classroom, I did notice three of my former students from Murray Middle School who would now be sophomores and juniors. As I sat through the lesson, I thought about how they must have just continued being tracked into courses that did not provide them with access to legitimate grade level

language arts curriculum. They were in the highest level of *Language!*; however, I wondered about their next step. For example, if the junior did complete the program and transition into a regular English class for her senior year, she would not be prepared. I thought, *How will she be prepared for the demands of college in another year if she has not had an opportunity to do anything other than drill and kill exercises?* (field notes, February 14, 2012).

In the second classroom, students also began with a warm-up. They had to label the subject, verb, adverb, pronoun, and direct object in the following sentence: The kitten quickly ate his food. Next the teacher talked about suffix and had students complete multiple rounds of writing as many words as they could with target suffixes. The exercise was set up as a competition to see who could think of the most words. Then students completed three suffix-related exercises out of their workbooks before starting a passage fluency. When the students left, the teacher let me know that everybody has a chance to be successful because instruction is at their level (field notes, February 14, 2012).

From the adolescent perspective, students in the *Language!* classes referred to the textbooks and workbooks while describing their classes. David described a typical day as arriving to class and noticing goals posted on the board and what to expect step by step for the day, which usually entailed reading aloud as a group, answering questions as a group, and then reviewing as a class (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Daniel expressed a similar format in his class, except in his class the teacher modeled a couple of exercises from the workbook, followed by students completing the rest of the assignment and regrouping as class to review the answers (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Emiliano's experience seemed to correlate as he mentioned teacher

modeling and instructions followed by independently completing worksheets (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

As far as topics, students frequently mentioned terms such as predicate and nominative in both November and April interviews. In April, David explained exercises his class did with one of the texts:

They had highlighted words in ‘em, so we had to go find the definition for it and then write it with the sentence for each one and then if it’s a story we read, we had to go find the predicate and nominatives and every noun and every adjective. Then we had to write ‘em on a piece of paper, give it to her and then if we missed one, we had to go back, read that story, and then go find it. (personal communication, April 27, 2012)

Although this process seemed extremely tedious to me and I thought that it would dampen any motivation that the text might have inspired, when I asked him immediately after if he was motivated to read the texts, he said that he was. Many of the selections integrated sports, his passion, and that appeared to be the hook for him.

When talking about their *Language!* classes in relation to our class at Mariposa Charter, students responded in different ways. In November, Renata and Daniel both noticed differences. Renata mentioned, “Um, I’m not sure yet. I don’t know. I haven’t related it yet cause it’s different” (personal communication, November 11, 2011). The only similarity that Daniel mentioned was the state reading assessment (personal communication, November 21, 2011), which really wasn’t a part of either of the programs, but rather a state-wide mandate. Referring to his first semester *Language! C*

class, in April, Emiliano mentioned, “You don’t read as much. You do mostly grammar things and spelling” (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

In contrast, David could not think of any differences, but rather stated, “Um, yes, they’re the same thing, just we have to read and then write the paragraph about it – what it’s about, and that’s it” (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Apparently, David did not distinguish between reading self-selected texts in a reading workshop context and written responses about books and reading selections from the program textbook and filling out worksheet pages. Based on his description of his class, I could think of many differences but he did not view them as such.

I originally did not include questions about fluency in my interview questions, and none of the students brought fluency up on their own; however, after observing David participate in a fluency exercise in one of his classes, I asked him to explain further. He explained the process and expectations for passage fluency and word fluency, noting that with word fluency they needed to read rows with ten words each with the same words mixed up in different orders. Some of the words were very similar, such as shallow and hallow. For passage fluencies, students read a cohesive narration, rather than individual rows of disconnected words. He explained the objective:

The goal is that we all have to get at least 145. That’s the *Language! D* goal, but if you don’t get more than that, it’s fine. They just want to see how well you say the words and how well your fluency is cause if you got a 65, that’s considered a really bad score cause you’re really slow, you’re messing up on words, either you don’t know English that well or you’re just trying to or you just don’t want to do it, so that’s how they figure it out. If you’re hitting the 145 and the 150s every

time you do it, they average that out and they're like hmm, this kid's doing really good so that's how they judge everybody. (personal communication, April 27, 2012)

When I asked him what the teachers told him about why fluency is important, he said, "They just say, they don't say anything about how it's supposed to help you or whatever. They just say, 'Oh, we're doing a word fluency today'" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). He emphasized focusing on trying to read fast while participating in the fluency measures, and when I asked if he thought about what he was reading with the passage fluencies, he said, "No, I'm just focusing on the score" (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

The way that he described what his teacher valued with regards to the fluency reminded me of what I was concerned about when I was at the middle school with the message that fluency equates to reading fast. It appeared that not much had changed with regards to understanding why fluency is important, as a means to aid in comprehension. As such, when I switched from Murray Middle School to Mariposa Charter, I talked to students about adjusting their rate to depending on what they were reading to ensure that they were focusing on understanding. Nonetheless, when I had the opportunity to observe one of David's *Language!* periods, I thought about how it sounded like I was in a room full of auctioneers as they completed one of their passage fluencies. David even mentioned about the slurping sound of one peer who was "really good" (field notes, February 14, 2012). It appeared that the sound was the result of spit that was accumulating in his mouth because he was reading so rapidly. That's not the way I

wanted David to be spending his time, nor what I wanted him to view as being “good” with regards to reading.

English 9

Prior to observing the *Language!* classes, I was able to observe the first *Language!* teacher while she was teaching three periods of English 9. The class started with a warm-up in which students had to re-write sentences (I will run to school. I will be jumping over the log. I am going to the movies.) to include an infinitive phrase. While they discussed as a class, the teacher mentioned they would have a proficiency over the content soon. Then the class transitioned into talking about ten propaganda devices. Utilizing a Power Point, the teacher introduced the devices with current advertisements, appearing that the teacher thought about connections to students’ lives while she was preparing. Students had a hand out in which they wrote down notes about the devices. When students were later supposed to match advertisements to propaganda devices, the teacher used a gradual release of responsibility and incorporated in questions to get students to think, such as “What do you notice?” or “Which would it fit?” She also continued to have discussions about the underlying messages and clarified questions as they came up. When students were working independently or talking with partners, the teacher circulated around to monitor progress (field notes, February 14, 2012).

English 9 students who had different teachers described a common routine of working on a warm-up upon walking into the classroom related to aspects such as: Greek or Latin roots, logic puzzles, or literary devices (Miriam, personal communication, November 22, 2011), and finding errors in a paragraph (Giovanni, personal

communication, November 21, 2011). Following the warm-up students discussed going over the day's agenda and described worksheets and packets.

A phrase that often came up was proficiencies, a new system that the high school started using this year. Students described proficiencies as tests. Diana elaborated about the process explaining, "You learn a lesson and then afterwards they test you for a week. You get a bunch of tests about what you've learned. It's to see how you're improving in that class on that lesson" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Diana explained that every day instruction is geared toward either preparing for a proficiency or taking a proficiency. She stated, "That's why we have to take 'em every day cause there's so many" (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

While all of the English 9 students mentioned proficiencies, it appeared that not all teachers solely focused on proficiencies as in Diana's class. For example, Giovanni mentioned participating in debates (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Emiliano mentioned that in his and Giovanni's class they read *The Pearl* as a whole class toward the end of the year (personal communication, April 27, 2012) and Giovanni added that they read *Romeo and Juliet* afterward (personal communication, May 22, 2012). Miriam mentioned doing book clubs toward the end of November, and her teacher assigned her to the *Lord of the Flies* group (personal communication, November 22, 2011). Interestingly though, when I observed at the high school I noticed that Miriam and Diana had the same teacher for different periods. When I observed, the lesson was the same, so either the two girls perceived the instruction differently or at times the teacher planned different lessons for the different periods as Diana did not mention participating in any book clubs. Regardless, students noticed a contrast to their reading class at

Mariposa and at the high school. Miriam explained, “Here [at Mariposa], there was more reading and writing. Over there [at Murray High School] it’s learning the phrases and stuff” (personal communication, November 22, 2011), referring to the emphasis on proficiency skills.

Rhine High School Advanced English

Erika, the only student who attended Rhine High School from the group placed into the Advanced English class for freshman. She described her class as focusing heavily on vocabulary and grammar. She explained, “Not nearly as much reading, more writing assignments and year-round Anything Books” (personal communication, December 10, 2011). However, she also highlighted that there was a range of activities within the class, rather than sticking to a set schedule or routine. She described the class as her favorite during the second round of interviews (personal communication, December 10, 2011). However, in the third round, one of her electives was her favorite and she mentioned that she originally said Advanced English was her favorite based on the teacher’s personality (personal communication, May 4, 2012).

Shifts in Placement

While many students stayed in their same placement throughout the academic year, three students switched placements for different reasons. In addition, Renata remained in the same level of *Language!*; however, her class switched to a period long class for the second semester, rather than continuing to be a double period class (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Daniel

Daniel started out the year in English 9 but then shifted to *Language! C* mid-semester because as he explained, he “was messing around too much” and was failing (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When I asked if the work ever seemed too hard, he said that it was not, but rather because he just was not doing the work. He said, “It was just boring to read the whole thing and then do the questions” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). I thought back to his middle school years and frequent check-ins we had with him and his parents in order to scaffold his level of responsibility, choices, and coping mechanisms. I also thought about his motivation toward reading when he found the topics interesting. I had no doubt that he was capable of completing the assignments (as he said he could) and could picture him just not doing so because he did not find the class engaging.

When talking about his English 9 class he explained:

There’s just these tests that you have to take a hundred and six of ‘em through the whole year, and you have to pass eighty six of ‘em. [...] It was boring to read the whole thing and then do the questions, so it just got boring. (personal communication, November 21, 2011)

As I heard him recount his placement experiences, I thought about the dangers of placing students based on grades or test scores alone without really getting to know students and considering what was going on behind the data. I was saddened that the shift from one class to another was not necessarily going to provide the motivation to continually improve and focus on being his best self. Nor was being tracked down going to support Daniel’s development as a reader.

When the counselor had him and another student go to her office to explain that they would be switching classes, he recounted that they both said they would improve their grades, but she told them she had to switch them (personal communication, November 21, 2011). However, he also explained that he had the possibility of switching back out at semester, stating, “At the semester they see how you’re doing all year or how you did on your tests and if you’re doing really good for the whole semester, you did good on your state tests, they’ll move you up” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Unfortunately, when I followed up with Daniel in May, he did not move out of *Language!* because he did not demonstrate his true potential on the state test. Instead he mentioned messing around and just skimming passages and clicking answers. When he retook the assessment later in the year, he nearly exceeded, finally demonstrating more accurately his abilities. As a result, he should shift out of that track as a sophomore (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Nonetheless, I cannot get the image of Daniel describing himself as laying his head on the desk out of my head. I think about lost opportunities.

David

In November, David discussed wanting to switch to a higher level of *Language!*, rather than being in level C because he thought it was too easy. He said, “I want to go up a level but they don’t think I’m ready for it when I got an A+, a 100% in the whole class, so they just keep me in there” (personal communication, November 11, 2011). He continued on, “They say that they want to see how I do ‘til middle of the year and see how I do and if I do better, if I keep my grade up to an A, then they’re going to move me up” (personal communication, November 11, 2011).

When I checked back in with David in April, he had moved up to a single-block of level D. He expressed a sense of pride in the change, as present in his response to my question of which class he was in, “I’m in *Language! D*, which is a higher level than *Language! C* and all those other levels” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). He was content with the shift, noting that the class was more “mixed” than the double period class that was predictable or as he said, “two periods with one same thing” (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

He described that the first day of the new semester he went to his regular class and the teacher let him and some others know that they would actually be in her class at a different period. When I asked if she provided further explanation once they went to the later class period he said:

She did. She explained what, how the class was harder and how we’re going to be ahead of everybody else. [...] She said that probably more advanced work with the finding the main verb or the subject or the predicate, nominative and all that and then there’s *Language! C*. They’re still learning the main idea of the story and then they’re going up a little bit higher.

Based on his two interviews, David appeared to be thinking frequently about the different levels offered. In November, he explained that sometimes his class went to different classrooms. For example, he said, “We’ll sometimes do a poem and we’ll have to go and read to another class, another *Language!* class that’s higher than us or lower than us” (personal communication, November 11, 2012). He appeared to link placement level with intelligence, as he outlined that the other students ranked them on a 1-4 scale, concluding, “So, it’s pretty fun, getting graded from smarter kids” (personal communication,

November 11, 2012). In April, he talked about *Language!* A and B being for beginners (referring to second language learners) and mentioned that *Language!* E was a harder level. Even though he mentioned the range of *Language!* courses, he did not seem to be aware of English 9 (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Emiliano

At semester, Emiliano also made a shift out of *Language!* C; however, he switched to English 9. “I didn’t know why I was in *Language!* C” he said, “Then they switched me out because I passed my [state reading test]” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). He explained that his teacher had told the class that those who passed their state test would switch out to the English 9 classes; however, he did not know for sure until he saw his new schedule. As he explained his experiences, I thought once again about making decisions based on standardized test scores. I knew that as a 6th and 7th grader he had met state expectations for his grade level, or as he referred to it, “passed” and that as an 8th grader on two of the rounds he was just one point away from meeting the state-wide expectation for his grade. It seemed so arbitrary that he had to spend a complete semester in *Language!* C, not even *Language!* E, because of that one point. He was one of the students in the stack of three that the counselor had shown me back in the spring when I pointed out that the three students were very different. Nonetheless, because he placed into level C, they may have kept him in that class regardless of whether or not he met as an 8th grader as a preventative measure as they apparently had with the student who placed into level D.

Student Perceptions of Placements

While interviewing students, I was trying to gain insights into what their classes were like and their opinions or thoughts related to their classes. While considering student comments related to a range of courses with multiple teachers, I noticed some general trends regarding an overall lack of reading, the perceived level of rigor, the lack of choice, and level of engagement.

Lack of Reading

Most striking in the second round of interviews were student sentiments that they were not reading in class. They seemed to express that they might be transitioning over to more reading; however, with the third round of interviews there were no dramatic shifts. I expected that they might not be able to choose their texts or that they might not have requirements to read self-selected texts outside of class, but I did not expect a lack of reading in general. None of the students from Murray High School mentioned their teachers requiring them to read outside of school, other than Miriam who was starting to read *Lord of the Flies* for her book club (personal communication, November 22, 2011), the first and only one of the year (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Furthermore, the majority expressed a lack of reading during their English 9 and *Language!* classes with the exception of Emiliano's and Giovanni's class reading *The Pearl* and *Romeo and Juliet* at the end of the year (personal communication, April 27, 2012 and May 22, 2012).

Renata said, "No, we don't read. It's just writing most of the time" (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Knowing that *Language!* did have reading passages, I mentioned that another student in a *Language!* class talked about taking turns reading selections out loud and asked if there was anything like that in her class. She

replied, “Yeah, sometimes they let us read it, but mostly the teacher reads it” (personal communication, November 11, 2011). I was surprised that she did not even consider the class as having a reading component because she was not doing the reading. I also noticed her comment, “sometimes they *let* us read,” making me think about how she seemed to view being allowed to read as a privilege.

Renata explained that part of the reason why the teacher read was because of an increased amount of discipline issues mid-semester as some students switched into their class (personal communication, November 11, 2012); however, in April she explained that some students shifted back out and the class once again had fewer discipline issues. She described that there was a blend of students reading out loud and the teacher reading out loud. She also indicated that they had a new teacher on Wednesdays who gave them candy if they read out loud (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

As indicated in Renata’s quote above, students often talked about how they spent most of the time writing; however, they later described the writing as worksheets or grammar drills. When I asked Renata to describe differences between our class at Mariposa and her *Language!* class, she said:

It’s more writing – it’s not like language arts. I kind of wish it were language arts because then you can write your own story. It’s just like it has a workbook and then you say which is the predicate, nominative or something like that and then you write it and what it is naming. (personal communication, November 11, 2011)

When I asked Miriam if she thought her class was helping her improve as a reader, in November, she stated, “I think more writing right now, since we’re barely getting to the reading” (personal communication, November 22, 2011) referring to the book clubs that

her class was starting. When describing the typical role of reading in her classroom, Miriam mentioned, “Usually, it’s kind of like, if you finish with this you can read” (personal communication, November 22, 2011); however, it sounded like she did not do so because the assignments usually lasted most of the class period.

Toward the end of the school year when I asked Diana if her class was helping her improve as a reader, she processed out loud, “I think so... well, no cause I haven’t... no, not really” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). I noticed how her voice got progressively quieter as she processed. When I asked her what she was going to say about not doing, she said, “I haven’t read, like I haven’t read an actual book in a while [...] Since school started, I haven’t read a book” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Daniel expressed a similar comment with regards to in-school reading, “We haven’t really had a project where we just had a book book where the whole class had to read the whole book” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When he said “book book,” he appeared to be distinguishing from the packet or textbook type reading that he had experienced in his two high school placements in contrast to reading novels at Mariposa. Further, Daniel commented on the structure of his *Language!* C class, saying, “We don’t read for a half hour. There’s more unstructured time where [...] you’re just with a partner by yourself and the textbook or something” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). However, Daniel did mention that there was more reading in his English 9 class, but like Renata, he viewed *Language!* as focusing on writing (personal communication, November 21, 2011).

In contrast to students’ experiences at Murray High School, based on Erika’s experiences in the Advanced English class at Rhine High School, reading was a regular

aspect of her class. However, she still thought that it was comparatively less than when she was at Mariposa Charter. “There’s not nearly as much reading in high school. Some in history, and English, but nothing compared to Mariposa” she said (personal communication, May 4, 2012). After noting that in high school overall she has more homework and less class time to complete assignments, she said, “[...] because of Mariposa I am one of the fastest readers/writers. I usually finish a book in two days, and other Rhine kids are complaining about reading books for book clubs” (personal communication, May 4, 2012). At first I cringed at “fastest” but then I thought back to a previous casual conversation that we had at the start of the year as she talked about the ease with which she could generate ideas and transfer thoughts onto paper at the high school because it was “what we did all the time [at Mariposa]” (field notes, September 23, 2011). I pictured her devouring books. Her reference to being “fast” had nothing to do with the auctioneer-like reading that I had observed at Murray High School.

I saw Erika shortly after the start of her freshman year, and she recounted how she had gone to the first day of school with three books in her backpack and was surprised that she did not need them. She had been used to teachers at Mariposa encouraging kids to have books with them throughout the day to read when they completed assignments in addition to daily independent reading in my class. When I asked her if her friends were readers, she said they were but that everyone was so busy with sports that if it was not homework, then it just would not happen (field notes, September 23, 2011). However, by the end of the year, when I asked her what her teachers value about reading she said, “Teachers in the high school KNOW we are doing a lot of things and are really busy.

They know how much stuff we are doing. I mean it's Rhine – it's not like we are a book kind of town" (personal communication, May 4, 2012).

Diana mentioned something that seemed to encompass the thoughts and comments of her peers, "Here [at Mariposa] we would have to read a book, and over there [at Murray High School] like not really. Like, it's good to read a book, but they really don't get on you about reading a book" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Thus, students still seemed to sense a value for reading, but it was not something that they viewed as being embedded into the culture of the high school.

In my observations of the English 9 and *Language!* classes, teachers did not incorporate books into the lessons. However, during one of the three English 9 classes, I did observe some interactions about books. While passing out the hand out the teacher noticed one female student in the back row reading the *Hunger Games* and said, "[Student name], have you read those before?" When the student nodded, she said, "Oh, good." Later in her lesson, while she was introducing the propaganda devices, the same student asked another girl a couple of desks over to see her book. As she looked at it, the boy in the middle who had passed the book as the intermediary said, "Oh, is that *Pride and Prejudice*?" He continued on to say, "I've seen the movie. It's good." The three students talked quietly for about 30 more seconds before passing the book back and refocusing on the Power Point (field notes, January 30, 2012).

At the end of the period, the teacher had a quick discussion with a student who was reading *The Hobbit* as the rest of the students were putting their supplies away. The student was expressing that he was still at the beginning and that it was "a little slow." The teacher responded, "It gets better. That's just the exposition." After the student

replied, “The what?” the teacher provided a quick explanation of exposition before the class headed out the door to the next class. I thought about how students and the teacher demonstrated an interest in reading and that the teacher was capable of being a valuable mentor for the students. Nonetheless, the interactions were on the periphery, rather than playing an integral role in the lesson (field notes, January 30, 2012).

Perceived Level of Rigor

Prior to interviewing students, I had been concerned that a drastic shift in curriculum and a value for skills or grammatical terms might lead some students to feel like their middle school years did not prepare them for high school; however, during the interviews, students did not indicate a sense of feeling unprepared for their high school language arts courses. In fact, students representing each of the three types of placements (*Language!*, English 9, and Advanced English) talked about the comparative lack of rigor, with few exceptions. For example, Miriam mentioned that at one point it was challenging to make the connection between some of the literary devices that she had learned in Spanish with their English label in her 9th grade instruction. She would have preferred learning the labels all in English so that she would have more quickly made the connection as a 9th grader (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Of *Language! C* exercises Emiliano stated, “It was actually really easy. [...] the worksheets, I already knew everything so it didn’t seem anything new so it was a lot easier” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Of the same level, David noted, “[...] It’s just I get that really easy and I don’t need a teacher to do that. I could just pop right out of my hand, just do it, and I’ll be done” (personal communication, November 11, 2011). However, when we talked in April, he seemed content with his placement in

Language! D. I wondered if the way the teacher talked about the course as being more challenging on their first day of the switch influenced his perspective on the class as a whole. He also mentioned a greater sense of independence, which appeared to impact his thoughts (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

While talking about English 9, Giovanni brought up his opinions about a perceived lack of rigor repeatedly. When talking about the high school in general, he said, “It’s big, different from here [Mariposa], more kids, everything’s easier though” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When I prompted for an explanation of how it was easier, he referenced aspects such as flexibility with due dates and re-taking tests. When I asked him what the warm-ups upon entering the class were like, he said, “Easy stuff, just like, someday he might just give us a paragraph, and we just find errors and stuff like that” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When he was talking about differences between eighth grade and ninth grade with regards to reading classes, he said, “Everything here [at Mariposa] was more challenging, more exciting” and when I prompted why he said, “We actually had to do a lot of work and over there [at Murray High School] we don’t” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Nonetheless, though he started his freshman year confident and feeling prepared, toward the end of the year, he felt like his English 9 had not prepared him to transition well into expectations for his tenth grade year (personal communication, May 22, 2012). I could sense his building frustration.

In her Advanced English class, Erika stated, “There should be more reading because when we get a reading assignment, we get like, a week to read 50 pages. It’s just too slow for me at times, with the reading pace” (personal communication, December 10,

2011). When I asked if she thought that her class was helping her to improve as a reader, she stated she did not think so, explaining, “We had such a higher level at Mariposa, that it just seems kind of ridiculous to me” (personal communication, December 10, 2011). However, she also stated, “It’s definitely improving my writing/grammar skills though” (personal communication, December 10, 2011).

Lack of Choice and Engagement

While interviewing students, I was also curious about whether they had any choice in what they read and if the materials motivated them to read. Erika was the only student who had elements of choice similar to experiences at Mariposa. For example, she had “Anything Books” that she read and reflected on throughout the year, and she also had some choice with book clubs (personal communication, December 10, 2011). All of the other students stated that they did not have any choice regarding what they read in class. David stated, “The teacher chooses for us, but I still go with it cause I don’t wanna fail the class” (personal communication, November 11, 2011). However, despite the lack of choice, some students did highlight aspects that they enjoyed related to course-related reading.

Miriam was excited to be getting ready for her first *Lord of the Flies* book club. While her teacher handed out the books without having students choose, she did tell students that if they would rather read one of the other options they could let her know. Miriam remembers Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and a third text as being other options, but she was more attracted to *Lord of the Flies* and did not request to switch. Thus, there was a certain level of choice (personal communication, November 22, 2011). In addition, David talked about his interest in the *Language!* passages that

included sports and mythical heroes (personal communication, November 11, 2011 and April 27, 2012). Renata and Emiliano also expressed that some of the passages were interesting (personal communication, November 11, 2011 and April 27, 2012).

Nonetheless, throughout student interviews, multiple students brought up that their classes were boring, but at times it seemed to be for different reasons. As previously mentioned, Daniel's boredom was one factor in his initial "failure" part way through the first semester, which resulted in him being switched to *Language! C*. However, he was not engaged in his *Language!* classes either (personal communication, November 21, 2011). In May, he talked about often putting his head down on the desk and described that it was just so boring with the teacher going over the same thing for three weeks in a row. When I asked him what the topic was, he said the schwa. It was one of the rare times during the interview that I laughed, rather than being able to remain neutral to avoid hinting at my opinions of what they were saying. He explained how the teacher wrote words on the board for them to identify the schwa and then talk about stressed and unstressed vowels. He mentioned how he asked the teacher why they had to learn it as he could not view himself explaining how to do so to somebody else or needing it for his future career. The teacher responded that it was a state requirement. Only it really is not, so he incorrectly thinks the state has a ridiculous requirement for high schoolers to cover the schwa based on his teacher's response (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Of his English 9 class, Giovanni also talked about boredom. For example, when talking about a packet to prepare them to debate the advantages of cow's milk vs. camel's milk, he said, "It was kind of boring. [...] it was obvious that cow milk was better" (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Diana's comments corroborated

Giovanni's, as she described her English 9 packets, "Cause they're like passages that I don't even know, so it's like – oh, this is boring" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). When I asked her to provide an example, she said, "It was this poem about a tree, just explaining how it was a personification about a tree and how it was coming and it was seeing stuff. I don't know. It was weird" (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Even though Renata expressed an interest in some of the *Language! D* passages, she also said, "They're just kind of boring a little bit cause I wish they would be more like us reading our books" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Thus it appeared that while she enjoyed some of the passages, she still would have preferred choice. When I asked her about the passages in November, I remember thinking that she seemed disengaged, that she was not providing very many details to provide a clear picture of what the passages were like. In the spring she said, "Some are interesting like I remember how I read about Gandhi and how I studied it in 6th grade. I liked that one. It was interesting and I listened to that one" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). As she said, "I listened to that one," I thought about how she may have seemed disengaged in November as a result of tuning out when the passages do not capture her attention.

During her interview, Diana brought up that the 9th graders had recently taken a placement test for sophomore honors English (there is not an honors option for freshman). I was intrigued when Diana said, "I felt pretty good about it, but I don't want to be in honors" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). When I prompted her to explain more, she stated that her older sister is currently in an honors class and that she is always complaining about homework. I initially thought she meant she did not want to be in honors because of the rigor of the work load; however, as she talked I realized that it

was more about the assignments lacking relevance, “[...] like there’s no point to the homework sometimes, so it’s like why take that class?” (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

When Emiliano mentioned that his whole class read *The Pearl*, my thoughts instantly drifted to my own freshman year and the way that my teacher had a simulation as a vehicle for us to understand the feelings expressed in the novel. However, Emiliano quickly stated that he did not like the book. As he shared what he remembered about the book, especially the killing at the end, I reflected on how sixteen years later I did not remember anything about that. Rather, I remembered the discussions about why the pearl or any great “lucky” fortune in life might actually turn out to be something negative because of the actions of others trying to capitalize on the good luck.

I was curious about the difference between what we were taking away from our freshman year experiences with the same texts, so I asked him if he knew why his teacher chose the book. He said, “It was just cause it was a folk tale and everything so we were learning about folk tales” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). I thought about how “learning about a folk tale” vs. considering the human experience has different implications when considering engagement and motivation. A “folk tale” even has that sense of being far from everyday life and experiences, something disconnected from our reality; whereas, the human experience is still relevant generation to generation.

Aside from lack of motivation related to reading materials, Giovanni also expressed frustration based on behavioral issues within the classroom. He explained that students did not typically complete their assignments. He said, “[...] my English teacher’s like, he’s horrible. [...] He has no discipline for his kids. [...] I kind of feel bad

for the guy” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When I asked if he remembered what he thought as he started to notice this, he said, “I was just like wow, this is different” (personal communication, November 21, 2011).

I wondered whether he was contributing to the environment that he disliked, so I asked him about his actions in the class. He explained a pivotal moment that shifted his motivation regarding his own behavior:

He would just like, ‘You know what, we’re not doing this,’ like after I already did the work. He’d just be like, ‘Naw, we’re not going to do this anymore cause nobody’s doing it.’ And then it would be like, ‘Well, I already did it,’ and then, ‘well, we’re not gonna do it because a lot of people aren’t gonna want to do it.’ (personal communication, November 21, 2011)

I considered how a student that was initially choosing to complete assignments even though he was bored ended up shifting toward the negative behavior because he no longer saw a rationale to complete the assignments. He continued to say that then the teacher would typically “try something else” with similar results. He concluded, “Every. single. day. [...] Pretty much – it’s boring” (personal communication, November 21, 2011).

Eventually, the boredom led to an increasing level of frustration and a sense of feeling unprepared based on missed opportunities to thoroughly understand the content that he was not as familiar with as the year progressed (personal communication, May 22, 2012). Giovanni did not appear to question the validity behind selected content as much as he worried about the sense that he was lacking competence with the topics of the proficiencies.

Emiliano explained his perceptions when he later switched into the same class. He said that Giovanni told him, “that guy’s not a good teacher” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Emiliano also stated, “Everybody’s saying that he’s not a good teacher. [...] Cause we don’t really do much in that class” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). I asked him if he thought that other students comments swayed his perception of the teacher or if he would have felt the same over time anyway, and he said that he would have noticed it on his own. It appears his reputation has spread beyond his classroom. When I asked Diana if she heard very much about the other language arts classes, she mentioned that she only heard about teachers. When I asked about what she heard, she said, “They’re always just complaining about how he’s not, like he’s a cool person but he’s not a good teacher, so I was like, well, I don’t know cause I don’t have him as a teacher” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). When I asked Miriam the same question she referred to two different teachers, stating that students did not do very much in the one classroom and then sharing that she had heard positive comments about learning in the other classroom (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Renata also experienced boredom in her placement, referring to the long double block of classes and the lack of choice. In addition, during the first semester Renata highlighted that as some students shifted into her class mid-semester discipline issues rose. As a result, the teacher was reading most of the selections to the class (personal communication, November 11, 2012). However, in her interview toward the end of the second semester, Renata remarked that the class reconfigured once again and the level of discipline issues was more similar to the start of the year, and thus the classroom environment was more productive (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Like

David, she was also pleased with the shift at semester from the class being a double block to being a single block.

Literate Lives

Based on getting to know students over a three year period of time, I had a strong grasp on students as readers, including whether or not they considered themselves to be readers. As they transitioned to high school, I was curious as to the level in which they would continue reading outside of school and who if anyone would encourage them to do so. Knowing that none of their teachers required them to read outside of the classroom, and did not provide in-class time for self-selected reading, with the exception of Erika at Rhine High School and the rare exceptions in Miriam's, Emiliano's, and Giovanni's classes at Murray high school, I noticed whether or not students were reading anyway.

I was not surprised with Emiliano's lack of reading, as he typically did not read for pleasure and often was not motivated to read even when it was an assignment. The one book that stood out to him as one that he could identify as really liking was Sharon Draper's *Tears of a Tiger*. When I asked him if he would want to read more books that were similar to it he indicated that he would be "kind of in the middle" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). I remembered that even when it initially captured his interest, it was not like he could not put it down. He read a little bit here and there and when he was part way through the book, he loaned it to Giovanni, before eventually finishing it.

However, there was a mixture of responses among those who were avid readers during their years in my class. Renata and Daniel expressed that they typically continued to read nightly. Renata mentioned that she had been up late the night before reading a

book but then went to bed knowing that she would have to wake up early (personal communication, November 11, 2011). However, Renata still expressed that she typically read less this year as compared to previous years. When referring to recently reading the *Hunger Games* trilogy, she said, “I read through ‘em more than I would have this year. It kind of felt like last year when I read a lot more books than I do now” (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Daniel brought up the topic on by saying, “I read more at my house than I do at school” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). He mentioned that he had been running out of books and as a result had been re-reading a lot of his books. When I asked him why he thought he liked to read each day, he said, “Well, cause I read a lot here [at Mariposa], so it made me like reading more” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). I wondered if his teachers even knew that he was a reader or if they just saw him as an unmotivated student, a “failure” based on his English 9 performance. Unfortunately, when I followed up with Daniel again in May, he was no longer reading because he got tired of rereading the same books multiple times.

David, who had not necessarily been an avid reader of books while in my class, did have a passion for magazines, which he sustained during his freshman year by reading ESPN magazines that he received weekly (personal communication, November 11, 2011 and April 27, 2012). After his November interview, I saw his mom and she explained that since he was not going to do a winter sport, she took him to the library. She let him know that since he would have more free time, she would have him read each evening just as he used to for his Mariposa nightly reading requirements. She told him

that he had to choose books in English and Spanish as she did not want him to lose his proficiency in Spanish.

Giovanni, Diana, and Miriam were three examples of students who had been avid readers but who did not continue to do so as freshman. In November, Miriam mentioned that she had read one book so far during the school year (personal communication, November 22, 2011). She later highlighted time as being a factor in her reading life; however, she also noted that she observed busy peers who loved reading so much that they made time to read (personal communication, May 30, 2012). After Diana said that she had not read any books yet when it was almost the end of her ninth grade year, I asked her if she had enjoyed reading at Mariposa (as I thought she had) or if she dreaded it. She replied, “No, I actually enjoyed it, but I haven’t found time to actually pick up a book to read for fun” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). When I asked her what she had been doing instead, she said, “Nothing important.” She said that she might read during the summer, or in her words, “Maybe if one day I have nothing to do, I might pick up a book” (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

I wondered why it was that students who demonstrated high interest in middle school had different outcomes with regards to their high school reading behaviors. I thought about how some students had continued to read, while others did not. A couple of students, such as Renata and Daniel, attributed their nightly reading routines to the habit that they developed based on school-wide expectations at Mariposa to read a half hour each night (personal communication, November 11 and 21, 2011). However, those students were both avid readers, so I tried to analyze further to gain additional insights into why they continued while some of their peers who were also engaged readers did

not. I started to notice and consider aspects such as: access to books, encouragement and models of reading, and discussions inside and outside of the classroom.

Access to Books

Giovanni was one of the students who really stumped me. Even within my classroom he had drastic swings up and down. The first spike was mid-seventh grade year to the end of the year. Then he seemed relatively disengaged at the start of his eighth grade year before returning to his previous voracious reading. I remember having Emiliano share *Tears of a Tiger* with him was the turning point as a seventh grader, but I cannot remember for sure what prompted the shift as an 8th grader.

I know that I had been encouraging him to read and checking in with him about books, but I cannot pinpoint the catalyst when thinking back over the year. The shift may have occurred with his *The Hunger Games* book club. When he said that the amount of pages they were supposed to read by the first book club meeting was a lot, I joked back that the book was going to be so good that his only problem was going to be not wanting to put it down. He quickly read the pages, and when I asked the group how far they wanted to read for the next meeting, he said he wanted to finish the book. He continued to fly through the rest of the trilogy. He and Erika ended up reading the set of three books in the time originally allotted for one, while others in the group, such as Miriam and Emiliano read two. Once Giovanni was hooked on reading again, he would quickly read through books in my classroom library and request if I could buy additional books by the same authors. Within a couple of days or over the weekend, he would finish his books.

Giovanni also recognized the shifts in his reading life, reflecting on not liking to read at the start of 6th grade to reading “all the time” as an 8th grader (personal

communication, November 21, 2011). When I asked him what made him start reading again, he said, “When I found a actual good books, not just straight up boring books” (personal communication, November 21, 2011).

When I first asked him if he was still reading at home he said, “No, my mom doesn’t want to take me to the library” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). I’m not sure how much he pressed the issue, as based on all of my interactions with her, she is extremely supportive of him and values literacy. He mentioned in the same interview that she reads to a newborn sibling. Knowing that he was also involved in a fall sport, I asked him if he thought that he was not reading because of a time issue or if he just didn’t have access to books, and he replied that it was because of access. I continued to ask questions to see why he was not finding a way to get access to books. I asked about the high school library, and he explained, “Every single time I go, since it’s the only time they let me go is during health, that’s when they’re at lunch” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When I asked him if the library was open before school, after school, or at lunch, he said, “Yeah, but I’m too tired” (personal communication, November 21, 2011).

I thought often about his response throughout the year. If he *really* wanted to read, he would make his way to the library rather than being “too tired” or he would walk to the public library. I started to realize that for him there appeared to be a difference between easy access to books and having to seek them out on his own. I thought about how he would read if he had someone putting books in his hands and talking to him about them.

Three out of the four students who expressed regular reading as high schoolers did appear to have “easy access” to reading materials. David received ESPN magazines on a weekly basis (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Erika and Renata both mentioned their parents buying them books (personal communication, April 27 and May 4, 2012). Even though Daniel (the fourth regular reader) did not seem to have easy access to reading materials, he stated that he had been re-reading books a lot because he was “running out” of new books (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Giovanni on the other hand said that he did not like to re-read books, so even though he had some of his own books, such as receiving a book each year for the school’s *Día de los niños* celebration, he did not want to re-read them (personal communication, November 21, 2012). Unfortunately, Daniel’s tolerance of re-reading books also reached its limit (after reading them about three or four times), so in May he stated that shortly after I talked to him in November, he stopped reading (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

It appeared that some of the classrooms had books; however, teachers did not necessarily book talk the books in order to familiarize students with the classroom books. As a result, students mentioned that there were books in the room but they did not know which kinds of books. In addition, Giovanni mentioned, “My English teacher has some books, but you can’t check them out or anything” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When Miriam mentioned that her teacher had some books in the classroom, and I asked her about the quantity, she said, “It’s not a lot, like you know, you had a lot. She has quite a bit” (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

Students often referred to books as being available for students who completed assignments early, but then they indicated that they never did so. Miriam said, “There

was one I was gonna go and grab one day, but then the bell rang so I left” (personal communication, November 22, 2011). Miriam also mentioned her teacher taking the class to the library to check out books. However, she checked out a book but did not complete it, stating, “I started and then I forgot about it, and it was just there” (personal communication, November 22, 2011). Thus, access seemed to be a key issue for many of the students, an aspect that impacted whether or not they continued to read; however, encouragement from others seemed to go hand in hand with access. Simply having books present in the school was not enough for some of the students.

During their years at Mariposa, students relied on the classroom library for many of their reading materials (aside from books that their families might have bought for them). The school does not have a regular library, but students had periodical opportunities to either take a bus to the public library or in their last year to have the public library book mobile come to the school once a month. I thought that the high school library would provide them with more of a young adult selection than my personal classroom library or the public library; however, the students that I interviewed did not seem to tap into that resource. Nonetheless, in her April interview Renata mentioned returning a book to the library, so at some point she must have started using the library (personal communication, April 27, 2012). In her November interview she mentioned knowing that Rocío was using the library (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Thus, some students were accessing books from the library, but it appeared to be an overall under-used resource by my former students.

Daniel mentioned that he did skim through the shelves but that the library did not have his type of books. Nonetheless, he did not ask the librarian for help (personal

communication, May 18, 2012). He did not appear comfortable reaching out at the high school whereas talking about books with teachers was engrained in the culture at Mariposa Charter. When I asked Giovanni about the library again at his end of the year interview, it appeared that in contrast to his initial comments that he was “too tired” to find the time to go to the library, it was really more about not knowing the process of navigating the procedures in the high school library (personal communication, May 22, 2012).

A combination of student comments made me think about how access to books was a critical component; however, it goes hand in hand with others who support the students in order to scaffold the processes inherent in being able to utilize resources available. While I would love to find that the years at Mariposa would be enough to sustain a life-long passion of reading without continued encouragement, I noticed that many students still needed those interactions that sustain individual readers within a community of readers.

Encouragement/Models of Reading

During the interviews, I asked questions to gain a sense of who (if anyone) was encouraging the students to continue reading, as well as who (if anyone) served as a model of reading. Knowing that the teacher as a reader and as someone who encourages students to read is inherent in the workshop model, I wondered if these elements would still be present in students’ lives as they transitioned to high school.

The students did not typically mention teachers that were encouraging them to read; however, they seemed to think teachers thought it was good if they were reading. When I asked Diana if anyone at the high school encouraged her to read, she stated, “Not

really, reading is just an option. No one encourages you to that much, so I think that's why none of us do it practically" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Even though Diana's English classroom had books available, I was surprised to learn that when the teacher encouraged them to access the books it was for the purpose of annotating excerpted pages aligned with the current focus of their proficiencies, rather than to read them for enjoyment (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Nonetheless, some students did mention teachers encouraging them. For example, David talked about his *Language!* teacher; however, he was referring to her providing test taking suggestions as he prepared to take his reading assessment for his third and final round of the year (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Other teachers would make comments when they noticed students had books (Renata, personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Interestingly, when students did identify teachers who encouraged them, they were not necessarily their language arts teachers. Renata mentioned her Success teacher (a course to support the high school transition) as being someone who loaned her books once she realized that they had similar interests in genres. This teacher did not have a classroom library but brought the book from home for Renata (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Even later in the year when that teacher no longer taught her class, she still checked in with Renata when she saw her in the hallways. Renata also mentioned another teacher who commented on her reading *The Hunger Games* by saying, "I really like that. It's a good book" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Erika's Advanced English teacher seemed to be the only teacher who continually encouraged students as

readers and structured her course in a way that supported reading self-selected texts (personal communication, December 10, 2011 and May 4, 2012).

Students did mention different people encouraging them to read at home. Diana's mom was encouraging her (to no avail). She stated, "She's always like pick up a book instead of watching TV cause she'd rather me do something that's actually going to be worth my time, other than just watching TV" (personal communication, April 27, 2012). This statement combined with her previous statement that what she was doing instead of reading as being "nothing important" made me think about how she still valued reading and that she knew her mom valued it; however, that was not enough to motivate her to read.

In contrast, Renata's parents were able to encourage her to read. She noted that if they knew she was borrowing a book from a friend they would say, "Make sure you finish reading so you can give it back to her" and she also noted that they bought her books as gifts (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Erika's family also influenced her as a reader. She mentioned that her mom and brother often give her books that they suggest she reads. Of her mom she said, "She just makes me, and gives me books all the time!" (personal communication, May 4, 2012). She previously mentioned that her mom has surrounded her with books throughout her life (personal communication, December 10, 2011).

David talked about how his younger sisters motivated him to read; however, he was referring to reading with them, rather than reading books for himself. They read to him and ask him to read them stories when his parents are working. His mom also

encourages him to read his magazines on Fridays when they arrive (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Discussions Inside and Outside of the Classroom

Those who continued to read, with the exception of Daniel, were able to share with people who continued to talk to and with them about books. Erika mentioned the most people, including her mom, brother, English teacher, and friends (personal communication, May 4, 2012). David mentioned talking with his family, especially his dad who shares his passion for sports (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Renata mentioned her friends (personal communication, April 27, 2012). I began to analyze the interviews to consider trends in conversations inside and outside of the classroom (or the absence of conversations) related to books.

At one point in her interview, I was interested when Renata stated that she knew her *Language!* teacher liked books “cause he has a whole shelf of ‘em” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). She said that he allowed them to look at the books but that he never talked about them. As such, she was inferring that he liked books by valuing them enough to have them in his classroom. When I asked Miriam if her teacher talked about herself as a reader or if she mentioned reading books outside of school, she seemed to have to think it through, rather than having an immediate response. She stated, “I can’t, there was, there’s been times where she does” (personal communication, November 22, 2011). Then she provided an example of the teacher referring to a book she read while they were working in a packet.

Many of the students highlighted that classroom conversations related to what they were reading were more specifically focused on questions to consider events of the

plot. For example, Giovanni stated, “Just what we read about, what the plot was, what the main character did, and who he was and stuff like that” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Daniel also mentioned his class’ conversations focusing on what was happening (personal communication, November 21, 2011). When I asked whether they ever talked about opinions or not, he replied, “Just finding the facts” (personal communication, November 21, 2011). David mentioned that his class would talk about words highlighted in yellow in the texts (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Renata mentioned that her class would discuss the assignment (as far as providing clarification), but they did not talk about what they were reading (personal communication, November 11, 2011). The discussions in Diana’s class were based on the proficiencies. For example, she said that the teacher regularly has them talk in partners about topics such as: point of view, foreshadowing, and literary devices (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

However, Miriam’s class did seem to have a wider scope of conversations. She stated, “Yeah, our conversations in classes, they go on for a while cause like one person’ll say something and then the next person’ll say something and it just keeps going cause all the different opinions” (personal communication, November 22, 2011). These conversations were linked to texts they read in their packets. Nonetheless, even though Miriam had been excited to go to her first book club after her November interview, she later mentioned that most people did not read the book. As such, the meetings turned into explaining what happened (personal communication, May 18, 2012). In addition, Emiliano’s and Giovanni’s whole class discussions about *The Pearl* included a mixture of

what was happening, along with what they thought was interesting and their predictions (Emiliano, personal communication, April 27, 2012).

Erika's class was the only one that actually read and discussed books regularly. She also mentioned, "Students like to read about things they can relate to – other teenagers for example. We read *Breathing Underwater* and a lot of kids liked it" (personal communication, May 4, 2012). It appeared that she continued to have the types of discussions that students mentioned enjoying while attending Mariposa, the types of discussions that lead to a sense of identity development and understanding of classmates' reading interests.

In general, because students perceived a greater focus on writing or grammar exercises and many of the discussions related to reading emphasizing basic comprehension, students, in many cases, were not receiving a sense of literate conversations about books they were reading in class. I wondered about the types of discussions they were having outside of class and whether or not they had networks of readers with which they had frequent conversations.

None of the boys mentioned having friends that talked to them about books; however, David did mention discussing magazines with his dad (personal communication, April 27, 2012). The boys appeared to perceive their friends as not being readers. Giovanni stated, "Not even *Sports Illustrated*" (personal communication, November 21, 2011). Emiliano described one incidence in which some of his classmates were discussing *The Hunger Games*, but he did not join in the conversation. I asked follow-up questions to try to see why he did not contribute. When I asked directly why he was not interested in joining in, he said he didn't know. I asked if he could remember the

book, and he could. I asked him if he had thoughts related to what they were saying; he did. Yet, he still did not want to talk about the books (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

I wondered if he was not willing to join in the conversations because he has never identified with being someone who likes reading. As such, that would not be part of his identity at the high school. Within our classroom, I expected everybody to read and to have discussions about books. I imagined that his self-perceptions of himself as a reader and the context in which it is not expected that all students read and discuss books impacted his decisions to not engage.

In contrast, the girls did mention discussing books with peers. Even though Diana did not read a book all year long, her friends continued to talk to her about the books they were reading, and she said, “Once in a while they’re like, ‘Oh, this book is really good. You should read it. I’ll let you borrow it.’ [...] but I never read them” (personal communication, April 27, 2012). She continued to stump me – even though she did not have to read for a class assignment and she perceived her teacher as only focusing on proficiencies, she did have others’ in her life encouraging her to read and offering to share books with her. If she had not enjoyed reading as a middle schooler, I would not have been surprised, but she *did*. Miriam was similar. She frequently read as a middle schooler but only mentioned reading one book when we met in November. Like Diana, she mentioned peers with which she discussed books both times I met with her (personal communication, November 22, 2011 and May 18, 2012). Through member checking, Miriam did however note that she viewed time as being a factor, as she said that she is never at home (personal communication, May 30, 2012).

In contrast, Renata mentioned in November and in April that she had one-way conversations with a friend who identified herself as a non-reader. She mentioned that even though her friend did not read, she liked to hear Renata talk about her books and even mentioned that her peer would initiate the conversations (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Renata said, “I’m just gonna try to get her to get a book that she likes” (personal communication, April 27, 2012).

In addition, Renata engaged in conversations with other readers, including Lorena and another previous classmate at Mariposa (personal communication, April 27, 2012). Erika also mentioned frequently talking with friends about books, saying, “My friends and I are almost ALWAYS talking about our books. We are such nerds” (personal communication, December 10, 2011), and then she mentioned the names of four specific friends from Rhine. She continued to express this relationship in her follow-up as she said, “My friends and I read a lot of the same material” (personal communication, May 4, 2012). Networks of readers and a sense of self as a reader appeared to influence whether or not students continued to read as they transitioned to high school.

Examining Experience through the Lens of the Questions: Student Impact

While my narratives of experience provided insights into my first two research questions related to myself as a teacher, student interviews provided data to analyze with regards to my third question: How do reading programs, in a time of accountability-based reform efforts, impact students? An analysis of the interviews combined with previous experiences with students highlighted important areas for literacy leaders to consider, including: the value in soliciting input from students; the need to consider how practice makes students feel; the consequences of decisions solely based on limited data such as

standardized tests, program placements, or grades; and the danger of easy interpretations of outward behaviors.

In addition to the general trends that emerged, I considered the data through the lens of what I knew about each student as a reader during their 6th – 8th grade years. I thought about the different outcomes and the insights they provided related to their classroom environments, access to books, and people in their lives who were encouraging them to read.

Rekindling the Passion

After months of sifting through teaching experiences for this study and reflecting on the significance, one afternoon I was sitting on the swing in my parents' yard. I opened up a Rubbermaid container that my mom had recently found in the garage. As soon as I saw the big scrapbooks I wondered if one of them would have a letter that my English teacher wrote to me when I was a sophomore. Flipping through the pages I immediately recognized her handwriting on the envelope and pulled it out and read her thoughts. I vaguely remembered that when I said I wanted to be a teacher she had surprised me by saying that might not be the best choice but then upon reflection of her comments wrote a letter to my parents. I remembered that she initially went into the medical field, rather than teaching because of her mom's advice.

Only when I reread it as an adult, there was so much more than just recounting the generational influence on career choices in her family. There was a glimpse into the policy world of education and the standards movement that would have been foreign to me at the time. She said:

[...] In spite of all its shortcomings, I don't want to quit teaching. I am still trying to get better at it. I want my students to know themselves, like themselves, and learn how to learn from literature as well as write well. I like what happens in my classroom.

[...] What happens outside my classroom is what makes teaching so hard. It seems the public is picking at us all the time. The [state department] is constantly changing the rules on us and not giving us support to implement the changes. The legislature is constantly voting in laws to take power away from us. It seems nobody even likes us—as a group.

So, Amanda, I am telling you through your parents' letter here: Teach if it is your dream. You can love it in spite of all that happens outside of your classroom. Create your own atmosphere of learning; shut the door on other powerful adults who want to ruin it.

And, Amanda, know that my classroom door will always be open to you.

(personal communication, April 11, 1997)

Her letter had been significant at the time she wrote it but was even more powerful through the lens of as an educator with first-hand experience sifting through the impact of policy on teachers and students.

I could connect to my teacher and all of the magical experiences that took place in her classroom during my freshman and sophomore years of high school. I thought about the self-selected independent reading and conferring, standing on our desks to see what it felt like while watching *Dead Poets Society*, *The Pearl* simulation, experiencing

Shakespeare for the first time... More than ever, I realized that a common thread between those experiences was an opportunity to really feel the messages inherent in literature and to connect with others in the classroom community to experience the power of text.

Had she not mentioned the impact of policy in her letter, I never would have known. That was not a message that she sent as part of the day to day life in her classroom. The letter captured so well the essence of my emerging analysis. Despite challenges that might arise with the policy and politics surrounding the educational landscape, connecting with students and being able to enact a vision of literacy that aligns with philosophy makes it all worth it – the reason to return each year with renewed energy and passion.

In the final chapter, I revisit the three questions and consider what the data suggests related to implications for literacy leaders and school communities.

CHAPTER 5: LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlighted the temporality of narrative research. Part of the value is in providing multi-dimensional glimpses into lived experience. In this research, I looked back on how the No Child Left Behind backdrop has heavily influenced the context in which I constructed my identity as a reading teacher during the first six years of my career. My thoughts also pointed ahead to a shift back into my 6th-8th grade language arts classroom after filling in as a sabbatical replacement in teacher education for the last year. I am at a cross-roads in my career as the Common Core State Standards implementation is unfolding and my state, along with others, is in the process of applying for a waiver from the No Child Left Behind accountability system in exchange for another means to measure effectiveness and growth.

Closely analyzing my own experiences and sharing them has value for other educators. By sifting through my stories and my students', I have considered implications for educators at the school, community, and national level, linked specifically to my research questions that continued to evolve throughout the research process (Shagoury & Miller Power, 2012). While making sense of the data, I frequently cycled back to the research questions:

1. How has policy impacted me as a literacy teacher and the decisions I make, as well as the pressure I feel, with regards to reading programs?

2. Which voices have guided, and continue to guide me, in the midst of an accountability-based landscape while building capacity to be an effective literacy leader?
3. How do reading programs, in a time of accountability-based reform efforts, impact students?

Considering the Questions

As teaching and learning are inextricably linked, so are my questions focusing on construction of identity as a teacher of reading and considerations for students within the classroom. After providing information related to each of the questions individually, I consider implications for the field.

Impact of Policy

My first research question considered how policy has impacted me in my teaching career. Through analyzing my narratives of experience three themes emerged: school/district approaches to accountability-related policy matters, tensions arise when discussing how to best meet up to accountability-based demands, and factors impact the sustainability of professional drive.

In an accountability-based context, I experienced a top-down leadership model. I was a technician expected to carry out the district's orders with regards to specific, rigid programs even when I noticed clashes between the program and my literacy philosophy as well as individual student needs. In contrast, I also experienced two collaborative environments with an expectation that I would come to the table ready to engage in discussions about how to meet the needs of students as a professional. While tensions

between practice and perceptions of promising practice rose to some extent in each of the contexts, it was most prevalent in the context in which leadership did not welcome questions or concerns about the district-mandated programs.

Through revisiting the different contexts in which I taught, there was always a sense of urgency to focus on sub-categories of students that had previously presented obstacles to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress or that had the potential to do so as the expectations rose higher each year. Nonetheless, I noticed an increased amount of pressure based on level of professionalism. In contexts in which my voice impacted programs, I had more ownership in outcomes. In the scripted context, I had a lower sense of ownership. It would have been ideal to disconnect my thought process from comparing what leadership expected me to do versus what I had learned as effective practice and what I was learning from my students; however, as someone who went into the field expecting to be a professional, I could not just turn off that switch. I knew I could not stay in such a position either. It was much too frustrating.

It was apparent that teaching in the context of being a technician carrying out practices that did not align with my vision for literacy was not sustainable. Being able to make a difference in students' lives is at the heart of satisfaction with a career as an educator. While working in the school contexts that fostered a culture of professionalism was more demanding, it was worth it.

Aside from feeling more fulfilling personally, educational leadership literature supports the advantages for students when teachers work collaboratively and continually build their capacity, carefully considering their own unique contexts. Referring to leaders in high-poverty high-performing schools, Parrett and Budge (2012) stated, "Leaders in

the schools we studied consistently considered the research base in the context of their own schools. They also used strategies that were uncommon but made sense in the school context” (p. 4). Furthermore, Parrett and Budge (2012) explain that there are examples of communities of practice that have been able to make a difference within their schools, stating, “[...] any school, regardless of its condition, has the capacity to reverse long-embedded trends of low achievement” (p. 13), and they highlight the importance of focusing on the ideals of excellence, equality, and equity in order to get there.

I have come to realize that accountability-based policy can have a draining effect on teachers. Regardless of the context, it is challenging work to closely observe students as individuals and groups and determine how to continually improve practice. I am fortunate to be able to work in a school in which I am surrounded by like-minded colleagues with regards to core-principles, while also each coming to the table with unique perspectives based on experiences. When the pressure rises or I wonder if I will end up being “burned out” as a result, they energize and inspire me to continue on with the hard work of being a professional.

That is the power of having the ability to influence policies and programs within a collaborative environment. Though NCLB related policy can be draining, it has also prompted positive changes. After recognizing that there are issues with the legislation, Beers (2007) stated, “[...] NCLB legislation compels each of us to examine and eliminate the instructional and individual prejudicial instructional and social practices that did indeed leave some children behind” (p. 5). Thus, with the pressure and draining work comes the satisfaction that comes with knowing that we are examining our practice and are truly considering how we can better meet our students’ needs.

Guiding Voices

My second question focused on influences throughout my career. I began my inquiry in many cases seeking an answer about whether or not certain accountability based reforms were steps in the right direction; yet, along the way I realized that it is often more about the way in which the standards and policies are implemented into the classroom that will determine the impact on schools and students. Thus, as an educational leader, it is essential to develop a strong knowledge base in order to actively engage in dialogue about current research, policy, and practice.

During the analysis of my narratives, trends emerged about different types of voices that have impacted the construction of my identity as a literacy leader, including college coursework, student voices, and on-going professional development and dialogue. All of these experiences interacting with other professionals and learning from students have strengthened my vision of literacy education and the rationale behind what I advocate.

In the reform landscape, I trust those who are knowledgeable about reform efforts, with strong considerations for the historical roots of current educational contexts and those who closely consider empirical evidence while also analyzing multiple factors when considering data in order to understand the students behind the numbers. In addition, I respect those who value teachers as professionals, as well as recognizing the need to have dialogues about reforms within specific contexts, rather than seeking or touting one-size-fits all solutions automatically. Referring to the Common Core State Standards, Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) embody this concept:

Any educator who wants to play a role in shaping what happens in schools, therefore needs a deep understanding of these standards. That understanding is necessary for anyone wanting to be a co-constructor of the future of instruction and curriculum and, indeed, of public education across America. (p. 1)

This statement made me energized to continue reading. I knew the voice of the authors would be one of valuing my capacity to think and analyze, rather than treating me like an empty vessel to be filled. Thus, the way that leaders frame their statements and their approach to engaging with other professionals matters.

Early on in my career I realized that not all “experts” were created equal. When I received a mandate to teach with scripted instruction based on what the “experts” were saying my students needed, I could not just blindly accept that the program was really in their best interest unless I could see the results in the day to day life of my classroom. Recognizing I did not agree with expectations but feeling like I still needed to build a stronger foundation of experience and continual reading prompted me to actively engage in the process of self-directed professional development. After completing my reading endorsement coursework, I continued to avidly read books by teachers and literacy leaders whose ideas aligned with what I saw in my classroom. Going through the doctoral process has helped me to hone my ability to be a critical consumer of research, rather than accepting all claims at face-value. All of these avenues provided me with alternate lenses from which to view mandates. I still wonder who I would have become without the connections that I had to the larger educational landscape through coursework, professional reading, memberships to professional organizations, and the blogging community.

It took me longer to realize that while “big names” who have gained my trust from throughout my career still catch my attention and cause me to pause and consider their statements closely, I do not automatically agree as readily as I might have earlier in my career. Instead, the opinions they state have to resonate with me not only on a philosophical level but also on a practical level. Positions have to recognize that some reforms are already in full swing and that while there is a need for advocating strong convictions opposing some aspects of them, such as the impact of testing on teachers and students, there is also a strong need for resources and support for schools and teachers trying to make decisions in their current contexts. I cannot put all of my energy into opposition efforts while others are engaging in the dialogue regarding implementation. If I do not play an active role, it will be decided for me. Owocki (2012) states:

At the crossroads created by the Common Core State Standards, there are many paths we could take. I suggest avoiding paths that cast educators as secondary decision makers or that offer quick solutions or packages. This crossroads provides an opportunity for educators to pave new paths with fresh and critical conversations about teaching and learning. (p. xvii)

By demonstrating possibilities through action reflecting careful considerations of individual students and context, I can contribute to overall efforts to highlight the importance of educators in the decision-making process.

Another source of pivotal voices in my career are those of my students. As I consider my current contexts and engage in dialogues about what is and could be with education, students’ voices from each year of my career are whispering (or screaming) in my mind. By listening to their voices and adapting practice accordingly, we honor them.

For me, teaching has been about the experiences, how others have shaped me as I have constructed my sense of who I am and who I want to become as an educator.

Student Impact

I sought to include student voices in my research because of the potential to provide an important perspective to my reflective process, a hunch that ended up being relevant. I wanted to balance my perspective with students. I wondered what their opinions would be of our previous shared experience, as well as their new experiences as freshmen. Student comments during interviews provided me with a new lens in which to reflect on previous students.

Students are sending us messages all the time. Some students do it explicitly. When students like Daniel put their heads on their desks or ask us why they have to learn about the schwa for multiple weeks, it is a wake-up call for us to step back and critically examine factors contributing to the outward behaviors. We cannot respond with easy answers, such as placing blame on students for being “unmotivated” or inaccurately stating that it is a state requirement. It is a shame that Daniel, a student who loves to read but does not have access to books and who nearly exceeded on the state reading assessment, was inappropriately placed in a remedial course for the majority of his freshman year.

Daniel reminded me of students who expressed their frustration with *Reading Mastery* out loud or with students who let me know that they were upset to be in an intervention course. His comments deepened my own frustration with watching the same cycle over and over again of viewing programs as being what this student population needs. Easy interpretations of outward behaviors often do not get to the root of the real

issues. Individual students with unique differences and life circumstances require digging below the surface, rather than making decisions based on minimal data, such as test scores or grades.

When students like Giovanni walk into classrooms feeling confident and prepared, but do not find an environment conducive to learning and they walk out of our rooms at the end of the year feeling unprepared, it is evident that something must change. It would be easy to confuse Giovanni as just not wanting to do the work. Through his interviews, he did not provide any indications of letting his teacher know that he loves to read and is really starving for relevant work in an environment conducive to learning. Along the same lines, students like Renata won't tell us that they would rather their instruction look different. In class they may smile and comply, feeling inward longings for a "language arts" class where they could have voice and choice.

Regardless of whether or not they voice their concerns, when students continue to be readers in spite of, rather than as a result of or in collaboration with our instruction, we need to pause and think. Wells (1996) and Atwell (2007) discussed students being compliant in high school language arts classes in order to reach over-arching goals such as passing courses. Students like Giovanni and Renata made me wonder about the underlying thoughts of my students who were not as transparent about their thought process while sitting in my *Reading Mastery* classes at the middle school.

While considering the impact of programs on students, I thought about one student in particular that I had at Murray Middle School who will be transitioning into her senior year. I remembered how she was quick to make connections with me as a teacher. Aside from seeing her in her *Language!* classroom, she also checked in with the

second *Language!* teacher during lunch time. As the teacher asked her if she wanted a Valentine's Day sucker I thought about how she probably continued to seek connections with teachers and that she thrived on everyday small moments of teachers paying attention to her. I felt a smile cross my face as I observed her interaction with the second teacher, and yet, I was left thinking about how connections are a vital starting point but not enough. Can we really feel good about ourselves if we have good connections with students but do not provide them with legitimate curriculum to empower them as they emerge into adulthood?

While noticing previous students from both my Murray Middle School and Mariposa classrooms in the high school, I thought about the differences in their middle school experiences but their overall similarities based on growing up in the same community. For a time, my classroom library and conversations about books were on the peripheral much like I observed in the English 9 classroom because of school mandates that valued a scripted program over teacher capacity, but it does not have to be that way. Student experiences and perspectives are multi-faceted. The programs that we implement will impact them in different ways. We can learn a lot from our students when we allow space for them to share their thoughts and perspectives in a way in which they feel comfortable being candid and we are receptive to considering suggestions, rather than being defensive. I well know the power of an alternate route of placing students, not programs, at the heart of instructional decisions. Owocki (2012) stated:

A set of goals or materials is only as good as the instruction associated with it.

The teacher makes the decisions that create the effective classroom; the teacher knows the children, their strengths, their experiences, and their needs; and the

teacher can use this knowledge to create the climate, culture, and curriculum for meaningful work. (p. xxiii)

I will never willingly choose to work in any school context that values programs over capacity and deep thinking about students, that tracks students and makes assumptions about them based off of limited data sources, that closes doors for students, rather than empowering them through their education. As an educator, it is unethical.

If I do encounter myself in such a context, I will not be a bystander while those in leadership roles demean me by deferring to “experts,” rather than valuing my knowledge of content and students. Instead, I would actively advocate for professionalism. I will not allow others to make me feel bad by saying that bringing up student concerns is whining. I would consistently learn from students and advocate for an alignment to a vision of literacy that promotes deep analysis.

Implications and Recommendations

Let’s see whether we have this straight: we immerse students in a curriculum that drives the love of reading right out of them, prevents them from developing into deeper thinkers, ensures the achievement gap will remain, reduces their college readiness, and guarantees that the result will be that our schools will fail.

We have lost our way. It is time to stop the madness.

[...] If we are to find our way again [...] we, as language arts teachers, must find our courage to recognize the difference between the political worlds and the authentic worlds in which we teach, to swim against those current educational practices that are

killing young readers, and to step up and do what is right for our students. We need to find this courage. Today. Nothing less than a generation of readers hangs on the balance.

-Gallagher (2009), p. 23 and 118

Based on considerations of each of the complementary research questions, I provide the following implications and recommendations for colleagues in the literacy field broken into two categories, implications for a vision of literacy leaders as professionals and implications for sustaining adolescent readers.

Implications for a Vision of Literacy Leaders as Professionals

Aside from the important work that occurs within our classrooms, as professionals, part of our role is actively prompting and participating in on-going dialogues. The following are recommendations for engaging in conversations with colleagues to promote professionalism in the field.

Considering What Matters

An essential starting point is having deep discussions about what really matters with regards to reading instruction. A vision for literacy should entail more than working toward students meeting minimum expectations on standardized assessments as the purpose is much larger than basic literacy skills. It is about being readers of the world and democratic citizens. Seeking input from local and national colleagues allows for avenues in which we can expand and refine our own beliefs based on research and experiences with students. If we consider education through a democratic lens, including the vital aspect of reading texts critically and valuing deep thinking while reading, there is a clash

with programs that focus on behaviorist, rote memorization of isolated (and sometimes irrelevant) facts or skills.

If we lose sight of what matters most, our students will suffer the consequences of instruction that is not responsive to their needs. Furthermore, the very teachers that go into the field with drive and determination to critically examine their practice in order to meet students' needs may leave the field if they are unable to encounter a school that is a good philosophical fit. Currently as a nation, there are frequent discussions about the Common Core State Standards. Calkins et al. (2012) describe them as placing a value on the meaning making experience of reading, as well as deep analysis of texts. As a profession, the transition to the new standards provides an optimal opportunity to prompt discussions regarding the definition of literacy, as well as inherent values. It is an optimal time for schools that have previously deprofessionalized teachers to value the voices of teachers in order to collectively determine how to empower teachers in order to maximize the potential for a collective effort to make a difference in students' lives.

Aligning Practice

Knowing what we value is not enough. We must engage in an on-going process of considering to which extent our day-to-day practice aligns with what we value. At times, we have to ask ourselves what we are willing to risk in order to advocate for the type of education that our students deserve. If we value thoughtful literacy, we should provide time, access to books and other texts, and facilitate deep discussions about texts within our classrooms. We must avoid and actively advocate against acting like machines delivering uniform curriculum without thinking about kids. That's counter to being a teacher.

Knowing Our Students

Information about our students must drive our decision making process. As professionals, we need to hesitate when we find ourselves or others making sweeping claims about why our students demonstrate the outward behaviors and levels of proficiency that they do. We must truly examine and consider multiple factors that impact their lives and their learning, rather than seeking quick answers or pointing fingers. Opitz, Ford, and Erikson (2011) advocate for measuring what matters most in efficient ways, while recognizing the importance of affective, global, and local assessments, rather than a narrow view of data. If the only data we have about our students is standardized test scores, we do not have enough information to understand what is really happening and what they need in order to continually grow as readers and democratic citizens.

We should be open to means to refine what we are already doing, as well as leaving open the possibility to have completely new visions of what could be over time. The bottom line is when constructing visions for reading programs; decisions should draw from research and professional dialogues but should always be grounded in individual contexts, informed by students.

Critical Thinkers

Even when higher expectations are present, publishers quickly prepare documents and statements to show how their programs are aligned. Earlier this year I heard an educator talking about how *Reading Mastery* released documents about their alignment to the Common Core State Standards. I thought about how the drilling and rote recall present in the program seems to be the antithesis of what educators hope to achieve with the standards, with regards to thoughtful literacy. Thus, it is critical to go beyond the

claims of others in order to analyze whether the data they are sharing aligns with what we value and with our interpretation of expectations. We must adopt what Allington (2012) refers to as a “buyer beware” mindset.

Understanding the Nature of Reform

As literacy leaders, it is essential to understand the larger context of education, rather than being narrowed in solely on literacy. A strong foundation in reform literature and cultures of change provide educators with a means to understand the contexts in which they find themselves and in order to determine how they might be able to impact change. It is helpful to understand if the context is lending to tinkering (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) vs. being receptive to larger scale changes. Some school contexts will facilitate critical conversations about values, alignment, and needs of students by fostering a culture of professionalism encouraging on-going deep reflection and dialogue.

However, other contexts discourage expressing concerns about school or district-wide initiatives and instead expect teachers to act as technicians accepting selected programs without question. Nonetheless, it is essential to continually work toward fighting for what we value. Recognizing where individual contexts fall on the professional/technician continuum and support the decision-making process related to how to approach suggestions for change, including the anticipation of the level of resistance to expect.

Finding Balance

Being passionate about teaching and learning and attempting to improve practice is intrinsically motivating and invigorating. Yet, it can quickly become overwhelming

when we add too much on to our plates. It is vital to reflect about our individual contexts and consider avenues to impact policy and programs at local, state, and national levels. However, then it is necessary to prioritize in order to determine how we can best utilize our time effectively, rather than being overextended. Nonetheless, it is helpful to have clear goals with steps to working toward them in order to intentionally focus on priorities instead of being swept up in the day-to-day life of being a teacher. Balance allows for long-term sustainability and fulfillment with regards to contributing to the field.

Sharing Our Stories

Our influence should not stop with our own students and school communities. As literacy leaders learning along-side students on a day-to-day basis considering their lives and the impact of various reform efforts on their schooling and futures, we have valuable stories to share. By sharing with local and national audiences, we can provide a counter-narrative to show alternatives to practice that has raised concerns with regards to quick fix accountability-based reform implementations. In doing so, we give students a voice where they may otherwise be silenced.

Implications for Sustaining Adolescent Readers

Educators and researchers in the field have outlined cultures of students as readers that can have a powerful impact on fostering a love of reading in adolescents (i.e., Atwell, 2007; Gallagher, 2009; Layne, 2009; Miller, 2009; Wells, 1996). However, trends in the decline of reading have also been noted as students transition to classroom contexts with different values (i.e., Atwell, 2007; Miller, 2009; Wells, 1996). The following recommendations are for professionals who encounter similar situations of

being frustrated and saddened by intentionally working toward environments that tend to engagement and fostering critical readers, only to have students transition into a system that appears to be a step backwards without the necessary layers to continually emphasize higher levels of analysis and enjoyment while reading. The recommendations link to what I learned from my students through interviewing them about their transition from a middle school reading workshop context to a high school context with limited opportunities and encouragement to read.

Identifying What Sustains Adolescent Readers

In order to start conversations about sustaining adolescent readers, we must begin with determining factors about the conditions and support that makes a difference in students' literate lives. A strong body of literature already exists as a starting point for discussions related to motivation and deep levels of understanding (i.e. Allington, 2012; Atwell, 2007; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Beers, 2007; Beers, 2009; Calkins et al., 2012; Gallagher, 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Layne, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Pitcher et al., 2010; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004; Rose, 2011; Wells, 1996; Wilhelm & Novak, 2011; Zimmerman, 2011). In addition, we can learn from our own students in order to illuminate what researchers and educators posit. From my students' interviews, I learned that the following factors make an impact: providing time to read in class, having an expectation that students will read outside of class, challenging students through fostering analytical conversations about texts, valuing choice, providing wide-access to high-interest texts, and encouraging and serving as models of reading.

Systematic Change

When students transition from one schooling context to the next, the teachers within the current school have the potential for the largest impact based on the accessibility and contact hours they have with the students. Thus, when considering supports for students, it is always ideal to first attempt to impact what happens in their classrooms. While observing at the high school it appeared that one teacher in particular was a reader and would be an ideal adult to regularly encourage and interact with students about books. If provided the support and flexibility to maximize her abilities, she would surely make a difference in the literate lives of her students and would most likely make valuable contributions to professional conversations at the high school about sustaining adolescent readers. Upon further observations, I would imagine that there would be many other teachers capable of providing the same. As professionals, we should be discussing how we can maximize the connections that all high school teachers and staff can form in order to instill a culture that values and encourages reading.

Thus, the first attempts as previous teachers wanting to impact the outcome of what happens to students once they leave their classrooms is to seek out opportunities to engage in respectful, evidence-based conversations about possibilities for positive change. A shifting of responsibility is not only the avenue for a high level of impact based on contact hours, but it is also more feasible as previous teachers have new classrooms of students. Nonetheless, the result of these conversations will not always be a guaranteed change as many systematic factors within the school impact outcomes. At times, there might be the appearance of no change as a result of interactions or very slow change. Rather than throwing up our hands in frustration, there are still multiple avenues

to make an impact in the meantime while keeping in mind that the ultimate goal would be to impact systematic change within students' classrooms.

The following recommendations are for teachers who meet resistance while attempting to advocate for students by influencing change within classrooms outside of their own. I will be writing through the lens of what middle school teachers can do to support students in their transition to high school; however, readers in different contexts can consider implications for their own situations and contexts.

At times I write from the voice of a collective group of educators, highlighting what we can do when commentaries are more generalized. Other times I switch to what I specifically will be doing, providing one avenue to achieve the concept that I am suggesting, recognizing that there are multiple avenues to reach the overall goals. Just as reading about how others have problem-solved in their unique contexts, my thought process, though specific to my setting, may inspire the generation of other ideas for varied contexts.

Impacting a Culture of a Value for Reading at Home

Some of my former students referenced that they continued to read because of the habit of reading that they developed while in my classroom. For those who attended my school since first grade, I know that I was building off of an already established school-wide expectation for a minimum of nightly reading during the school week. Others also highlighted the importance of family members who encouraged them to read. Thus, in the absence of a culture of reading within high schools, a culture of reading or a value of reading within the family is an avenue to make an impact on students.

While students are within our classrooms, we can collaborate with colleagues in order to determine how our systematic expectations and interactions with parents foster a stronger literacy support at home, often by building off of what is already present in the homes, whether it is oral storytelling or a community of readers. Recognizing that the elementary level provides a strong foundation, just as support at the middle school level can impact the high school level, means that it is ideal to interact with colleagues across grade-levels. There are many ways to dialogue with parents and families about the importance of literacy, as well as to provide suggestions about how to do so. Individual teachers just need to consider what they and their colleagues are already doing, as well as what they could do to improve within their own unique contexts. Efforts to influence a value for reading at home would never go to waste. If students do transition to high schools that continue to foster a value for reading, the family and school supports would complement each other.

Intentionality within the Classroom

As middle school teachers, we can also consider what we learn from previous students and their transitions in order to improve practice within our classrooms with an eye toward making every effort to increase the chances that adolescents will sustain their reading lives when they transition. Seeking my students' feedback about what impacted them as readers within my classroom provided me with valuable insight into what I can maximize with future students. While some aspects, such as choice, were not a surprise, I was surprised that the social interactions made such an impact. As a result, their feedback served to reaffirm what I was doing while also providing for areas to ponder. In this case, I will go back to my classroom with a higher level of awareness of the relationships that

are forming in my community of readers. I will continue to seek student input, knowing that it is a valuable source of data to illuminate practice.

Identifying Needs and Desires

Aside from thinking about what we can do within our classroom, we can consider how we can facilitate or support students in removing obstacles from their literate lives. Talking with my previous students reaffirmed that just as students are unique individuals within our classrooms, requiring different approaches, the same is true once they transition to the high school. Participants in this study made me think about the range of needs and desires among students as they make their transition, providing me with a starting point for profiles of types of students and the support that they may need. The following is a description of three profiles: fortunate readers, motivated readers without books, and aliterate readers. In addition, there are mixed profile readers, students who demonstrate characteristics or could benefit from the recommendations of multiple profiles.

Erika is an example of a student who was fortunate enough to have time for reading and encouragement to read from her high school teacher. She also lived in a household that valued reading and that had wide access to books. It is challenging to think about how to juggle providing support for previous students, given that meeting the needs of current students within our classrooms is time consuming as it is. Thus, it is necessary to prioritize needs. Students like Erika would not be a top priority because they are fortunate enough to already have encouragement and access to books, even when they recognize a comparative decrease in reading. Erika reminds me of myself and the way that my reading for pleasure decreased so much during my college years that I essentially

forgot how much I loved to read; however, it only took my cooperating teacher encouraging me to read middle grades/YA books during student teaching and my sisters passing on a book to me my first year of teaching to reignite that passion for reading. Students like Erika may find that their amount of reading over their life time may ebb and flow, but ultimately being a reader is already deeply embedded in the core of their being.

However, other students could benefit from continued support. Students like Giovanni and Daniel form a second profile of readers, those who are highly engaged readers but do not have access to books. Once again, considering resources within the high school would be the ideal starting point. Daniel indicated that the library did not have his type of books, while Giovanni expressed that he was unsure of the process of how the library worked. One solution that would require relatively little effort but that could make a great impact on students is to try to reverse the trend of the high school library as being an under-utilized resource.

Prior to having students visit the high school at the end of their 8th grade year, I will collaborate with the counselors and librarian to highlight the library during the high school visit. Ideally, the librarian will raise the level of comfort for students to enter the library by explaining the procedures, as well as demonstrating that the library is a resource for their type of books. With those objectives in mind, I would discuss with the librarian who my students are as readers and assess the texts that are available in the library that would closely align to their interests. That way the librarian could book talk or point out areas of the library tailored to the readers in the class. I would also ask about possibilities for providing suggestions for new additions. Just as I ended up building my classroom library based on student feedback about gaps that I needed to address in order

to align to their interests, I would imagine that the high school librarian would be open to student requests to keep in mind as funds allow for new books.

Initially I thought about the value of building home libraries for students; however, both Giovanni and Emiliano taught me that what they need is access to a flow of new books as lack of tolerance for either re-reading or multiple re-reads eventually becomes an obstacle. Many of the students still come back to the school because they have siblings or cousins still attending; however, the frequency varies. Thus, aside from the high school library as a resource, I am now considering how my classroom could be a resource for both present and previous students; however, it would need to be set up differently in order to accommodate their varied needs. Students like Erika who already have outside access to books would still be welcome to utilize the resource; however, the target audience would be to address the need to get books in the hands of motivated readers who otherwise state a lack of access to books as the primary obstacle to sustaining their reading lives.

Next year I will be piloting a section of books that will be set up based on Jennifer Allen's (2006) innovative response to trying to get books into the hands of students in her school. The system allows students to have books that they then decide whether they want to keep or exchange for a different book upon reading it. This portion of the library will be specifically for high school students who return to the school. Of course, one obstacle will be funding. The library may need to start small with books that I currently have boxed up at home that would appeal to high school readers. I will add books as possible with my personal money; however, I will look into grant opportunities or other options to acquire books at a low cost. The library will be tailored to the interests of the

students who end up accessing it. The extent to which the library grows will depend on the number of students utilizing it and the frequency with which they access it.

A third category of readers are aliterate readers, such as Emiliano, Diana, and Miriam. In many ways, this is the most challenging set of readers because the factors that could make the greatest difference are often outside previous teachers' control once they leave the classroom. In addition, this group of readers would potentially have a wide-range of sub-categories linked to why students are choosing to not read. Students like Diana and Miriam enjoy self-selected reading when it is a requirement; however, once the requirement is absent, they no longer prioritize reading. Students like Emiliano have lukewarm attitudes toward reading even when it is a part of the classroom culture to read regularly. Nonetheless, all three expressed an enjoyment toward discussing books they read. Thus, creating opportunities beyond middle school to read and discuss books would be one potential avenue to foster a higher level of enjoyment toward reading.

The challenge, of course, is developing a sense of motivation to read and engage in conversations when it is not a requirement, especially in the midst of a busy high school lifestyle. One possibility would be having book club opportunities beyond middle school. As students transition to high school, they can benefit from books as a means to understand their lives and the transitions they are encountering. The summer between 8th and 9th grade years may be vital in hooking readers on book clubs outside of the regular school year requirements in order to establish a sense of enjoyment prior to starting their 9th grade year. As with building a classroom library for motivated readers who do not have access to books, there would be challenges with funding and prioritizing resources. However, if it would make a difference, it would be worth exploring avenues to

overcome these obstacles, such as grants and partnerships with universities and/or local libraries.

Another avenue to engage students in on-going dialogues about books would be to present opportunities in which students can interact with middle school readers during the school year in book club discussions. While they might be able to come back to the school on some occasions, where that is not possible, they would be able to engage in on-line book club discussions. This was something that some of the participants did with 6th and 7th grade students during their 8th grade year and enjoyed it.

Though book clubs with peers and younger students would be specifically targeted to students in the aliterate profile, it would be open for all students. In fact, the participation of students who already have a stronger motivation to read would likely help build enthusiasm for peers. Thus, though challenging to continually support the engagement of aliterate readers, there are still avenues worth exploring.

In addition to the three profiles of readers, there are mixed profile readers. Students like Renata have some common characteristics with Erika. They still have access to books, their parents encourage them to read and provide them with a steady flow of new books, and they borrow books from friends and utilize the high school library. Nonetheless, the on-going support for reading within the day-to-day life of her school is in direct contrast to what Erika is experiencing. As a result, while she continues to read despite of the lack of expectation for a high volume of reading at school, she could still benefit from additional encouragement to read.

David is also a mixed profile reader. While he continued to read as a freshman, his regular reading is limited to a magazine subscription. He did not identify being able to

discuss what he reads with any peers. He could benefit from the avenues to scaffold discussions about books tailored to aliterate readers. As such, the recommendations to meet the needs of the other profiles would be beneficial supplements to the supports that mixed profile readers already have in place.

Recommendations for Further Research

The field of fostering and sustaining adolescent literacy in an accountability-based reform context provides multiple avenues for continued research. The following four recommendations are a glimpse into the possibilities. The first two are related to my vision of literacy leaders as professionals recommendations, while the second two are related to my recommendations for sustaining adolescent readers.

1. *How did we get here and how can we change it?* The approach that some schools take to meet the demands of accountability mandates have characteristics that are not aligned with the existing body of research related to adolescent literacy and motivation. In order to work toward supporting a paradigm shift, it would be beneficial to have in depth research focusing on the experiences that have led to various stakeholders to advocate for or mandate practice that counters conditions that facilitate high levels of literacy and motivation to read. Gaining a better sense of how we got here will provide a more solid foundation for discussions about how to impact change to move toward another direction. Coupled with this is the need to then research the conditions that foster systematic change in schools where teachers have been deprofessionalized. This

research would support the overarching goal of trying to enact change that maximizes the impact of students' current classes and school cultures.

2. *Context-Based Understanding of Teachers.* In addition to understanding the path that has led to starkly different underlying values and assumptions related to what students need to meet up to accountability-based assessments, it would be valuable to examine teachers in different contexts. For example, it would be beneficial to have more narratives of experience to add to those already existing that consider aspects, such as how teachers define literacy, the experiences and people who have shaped their instructional decisions, and what they can tell about their students as individual readers. Gaining additional insights into the convictions and knowledge base of teachers in different contexts would support better understanding of various educators in order to engage in productive dialogue.
3. *Adolescent Profiles.* In my recommendations I discussed initial profiles that I noticed based on a small number of participants. Future research to consider a larger population of adolescents through the lens of the profiles, as well as a consideration for additional profiles would be beneficial. After all, we cannot address the issue of trying to foster adolescents sustaining their literate lives when it is no longer an expectation or requirement if we do not understand the individualized conditions that support them or the obstacles to doing so.

4. *Profile-Based Supports*. After discussing my initial profiles, I also provided recommendations to respond to these expressed needs. Additional research into the effectiveness of these and other recommendations for impact, specifically focusing on overcoming resource-related obstacles, would be valuable contributions to the field.

Conclusion

As a reading and writing workshop teacher, it is an honor to have students mimic what I am doing – to see them think like readers and writers and to seek out mentors to help them improve. However, when I saw my *Reading Mastery* students pick up the script and delight in playing teacher, I realized that it was a problem that it made me sick rather than proud that my students were role playing my actions.

How can we value rote regurgitation over thinking? How can we justify drilling and drilling and say that we are preparing kids? At the heart of it all, if educators are asked which they want for their students after hearing a description of basic literacy and thoughtful literacy, they would most likely opt for thoughtful literacy. Nonetheless, some implemented programs would suggest otherwise. That is why critical examinations are necessary in order to consider how what we are doing today reflects underlying values and will have an impact on the types of literacies that students acquire.

We need to make what we value take the center stage in our classrooms. If we care about it, our day-to-day actions and the culture of our schools should demonstrate it, rather than having it play a periphery role or be completely lacking. As a third year teacher, I read *Mosaic of Thought* during my scripted year and recognized the contrast between the collaborative environment highlighted in the book and what I was

experiencing in a context that deprofessionalized teachers (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). When I transferred to Mariposa I realized that the type of professional community was possible for those willing to demand it as part of the role of being an educator. It has not gone away as accountability pressures have increased.

Guiding voices are not those who come in as knowing all the answers. They are those who recognize they have valuable contributions to add to the dialogue while empowering others to closely consider their contexts and students, while thinking about how together they can support each other in making an impact. I will intentionally surround myself with those who are wise and solution oriented as my mentors and I will also seek to provide the same for those who view me as a mentor. Because I am fortunate enough to work in an environment that lends itself to being a professional, I have a responsibility to take my role seriously and live up to the freedoms and autonomy allowed.

Other leaders in the field have previously pointed out concerns with the direction we are heading as a country. Aspects of my students' responses align with commentaries by literacy leaders (Atwell, 2007; Gallagher, 2009; Miller, 2009; Wells, 1996). It is not enough to shake my head at certain aspects of instruction in my community or to criticize what I notice. Rather, I need to ask myself, "So what am I going to do about it?" As a field, we have to think about what we are willing to do in order to positively impact the direction of literacy instruction and the literate lives of adolescents within our country. I have provided some recommendations for impacting a value of literacy leaders as professionals, as well as sustaining adolescent readers based on what I learned through the process of this research. We can all learn from carefully listening to teens in our lives

and then considering how we can impact their lived experiences based on avenues that align with our contexts and capacities. Through engaging in on-going dialogues, together as literacy professionals, we can continue to better support the adolescents with which we interact.

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APPENDIX A

Round One: Interview Questions/Prompts

1. Tell me about yourself as a reader.
2. What is the role of reading in your home?
3. Did you noticed a change in your level of interest toward reading or the amount of time that you spend reading during your middle school years? (If yes, please explain why you think this change occurred.)
4. Were there any classroom activities that made you excited to read? Please tell me about them.
5. Were there any classroom activities that did not make you excited to read? Please tell me about them.
6. In class you read in different ways. Please tell me what you liked or did not like about read alouds, choosing your own book, reading the same book as a small group in book clubs, or reading the same book as a whole class.
7. What did you think about having two teachers in the classroom during reading time?
8. What do you think good readers focus on as they read?
9. Do the books that you read impact the decisions that you make in your life or the way that you respond to events in your life?
10. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about you as a reader?

APPENDIX B

Round Two: Interview Questions/Prompts

*All school names have been changed to pseudonyms.

1. Tell me about the high school.
2. Which classes are you taking at the high school?
3. Describe what your reading (or language arts) class is like. Try to explain a typical class from start to finish if it is similar day to day or a general overview if it changes.
4. Do you notice any similarities to your reading class when you were at Mariposa?
5. Do you notice any differences to your reading class when you were at Mariposa?
If so, how do you feel about the changes?
6. Do you think that your reading class is helping you improve as a reader? How?
7. Are you able to choose what you want to read
8. Are you able to discuss what you read with others?
9. What have you been reading this year for pleasure/for fun?
10. Do you talk about books with your friends outside of reading class?
11. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about the high school or yourself as a reader?

APPENDIX C

Round Three: Interview Questions/Prompts

*All school names have been changed to pseudonyms.

1. Which reading or language arts class are you in right now at the high school?
Have you been in that class all year?
2. At the high school they have different classes for reading/language arts. Do you know why you are in the one you are?
3. Thinking back over your freshman year, what (if anything) can you think of that we did in your classes with me at Mariposa that helped prepare you for reading and writing in high school?
4. Thinking back over your freshman year, what (if anything) can you think of that you wished we would have done in your classes with me at Mariposa to better prepare you for reading and writing in high school?
5. How do you think about yourself as a reader now?
6. What (if anything) do you think you will read over summer break? Explain.
7. Who (if anyone) encourages you as a reader at the high school? (Staff, teachers, friends, etc.) Describe how you are encouraged.
8. Who (if anyone) encourages you to read at home? Describe how you are encouraged.
9. Who (if anyone) talks to you about books that they are reading?
10. Who (if anyone) do you talk to about books you are reading?
11. Describe the types of reading that you have done in your language arts classroom since the last time that we talked.
12. Are you motivated or excited to read in your language arts class?

13. What do you think your teachers or other staff members at the high school value about reading? (Or, in other words, what do they seem to think is important related to reading?) Have you noticed any similarities or differences in this area between the high school and Mariposa?
14. Do the teachers tell you anything about yourself as a reader?
15. Do you hear anything about other reading or language arts classes at the high school?
16. You might have heard that new state legislation allows students to choose between Murray High School, Rhine High School, and Thompson High School. If you had that choice last year, which option do you think you would have chosen? Why?
17. If Mariposa Charter had a high school, would you have wanted to stay at Mariposa? Why? What would be advantages of staying at Mariposa? What are advantages of going to another high school?

APPENDIX D

Sample Field Texts to Process Experiences

Excerpt from a Blog Post Reflecting on Assessments

The current context of education definitely has a sharp focus on data and assessment, yet I am at times worried with the type of assessments that are valued and the decisions that educators make about students based on limited data and/or without considering the full student. I know that at times teachers are not allowed to control some of the decision making process, and depending on the context, they may fall anywhere on a spectrum ranging from feeling like they are treated like a technician to feeling like a professional. Yet, I still have strong beliefs that regardless of where teachers encounter themselves, the more they understand about assessment and data the better, allowing them to carefully analyze expectations and practice in order to improve as a practitioner.

My dissertation in progress is a narrative inquiry, so I have been closely analyzing and considering my personal teaching experiences including both ends of the spectrum. My third year teaching, I was in a context where I mainly taught sixth graders with scripted reading instruction with strict expectations to follow the curriculum with fidelity, leaving little room for implementing other aspects that I highly valued.

At the time I was completing a practicum for my reading endorsement, and revisiting my practicum journal has reminded me just how conflicted I felt. The way that I taught that year clashed with my personal literacy philosophy, yet I did not necessarily feel confident that I "had all the answers". I knew what I would do if given the flexibility, but I also knew that along with that, I would need to have a supportive environment that would allow for space to build capacity over time.

During that year, placements were made primarily on measures of oral reading "fluency" (narrowly defined as speed) and in-program placement tests. I knew the needs of students in my classes were very different, and Marsha Riddle Buly influenced this thought process the summer prior when she taught a course that I attended while on exchange to Mexico. She shared articles that she had written about findings from a study she and a colleague conducted about the varied needs of students who did not meet state assessments in Washington.

Experiences with one parent in particular stand out from that year - a parent who wanted answers, wanted to know what her child truly needed to grow as a reader. She checked in with me, as well as a couple of school leaders. I did not feel that she received the information she needed to know, a true diagnostic assessment. I was able to notice a lot about her in class, but the program and in-program assessments did not really get at the big picture, and I was told to focus on instruction. However, I knew that diagnostics and instruction were intertwined. This was an area where I would want to continually grow, and I knew that in order to truly understand my students' needs and have the flexibility to adapt instruction to tailor to those needs, I needed to look for a new position.

The few years after I had the opportunity to continually build on my base of knowledge and teach in a way that aligned with all those thoughts of how I would respond to student needs if I was not bound to a scripted program. I became familiar with a wider range of

assessments and data, some more helpful than others and some easier than others to manage time-wise.

(Posted on December 27, 2011 on

<http://www.snapshotsofmrsv.blogspot.com/2011/12/focusing-on-assessment-hook-behind.html>)

Excerpt of a Research Memo from Sunday, May 13, 2012

I am also thinking a lot about those literate conversations (with teachers, with friends), and where students have access to books. I am thinking about the time allowed to read in class or as assigned homework and aside from Erika, it does not seem to be very consistent or prevalent if present at all. I am thinking about the glimpses into the first Murray High School teacher as a reader that I saw interacting with the one boy and the one student at the desk, I am thinking of the students in the back row sharing their books – I am thinking about the convos as being either “off task” or marginalized (passing out papers, waiting for the bell to ring), but that there are some foundations to have quality literate conversations, the motivation is there. Thinking about how even Emiliano might contribute if it was set up as an expectation and part of the culture where it was accepted, thinking about how Giovanni would be reading if he had easy access, even though I would have wished that he would have continued on with that initiative on his own, he didn’t so I am sad that he does not have access. Wondering if the teacher even knows that he is a reader. I also wonder about Lorena and whether or not she reads, given the different routes that students have taken based on whether or not they sustain that relationship with books. I also think about my transition to college and not reading though, so how can I blame them or wonder why they don’t with this transition. I think

about my sisters being that hook back into reading (well, before it was in my cooperating teacher's suggestion to read as much MG as possible). Interesting to think about those motivators along the way. I wonder when I would have eventually found my way back to reading on my own without those interventions – that sense of making time and space to read in busy lives.

APPENDIX E

Sample of Narrative Coding Process

The following is a sample of excerpts that I eventually grouped into a pile with the post-it label “tensions” (4 out of the 16 total excerpts in the pile). The left hand side column includes the margin notes that I wrote on the hard copy, while the right hand side of the column includes the excerpt to which it referred.

Margin Notes	Excerpts
Want for kids	[...] and I don't want [my daughter] to be spending most of her elementary school in scripted reading and math with very little of anything else!
Concern for big picture/ long-term	I worried that this drill and kill would not lead to enduring memory of important concepts. Worse, I could not see a connection of how this program with so much repetition, rather than thinking, would support a life-long love of reading, nor how it would impact their overall improvement and effectiveness to be successful in high school and beyond.
Conscious of own behavior, not wanting a bias to impact students	I tried to deliver the lessons with enthusiasm, masking my feelings about the lessons. I was initially relieved that students did not automatically come in with distaste for the program that most of them would have experienced in elementary school.
Tensions, belief of well-intentioned YET...	<i>I could go on and on. My stomach clenched at the mention that if kids could not show good progress within the program, they would need to start over at a lower level and work their way back up and eventually repeat the lessons again. The year left me thinking that there had to be something better. I wish that I could have seen a shift in practice that year, that my concerns could have demonstrated the need for a difference. However, the district believed in the programs, and I knew I did not have all the answers. I respected that they were doing what they thought would provide you and your classmates with the best opportunity to improve. And yet, it was still so frustrating.</i>

The following is a sample of excerpts that I eventually grouped into a pile with the post-it label “learn: courses, students, PD” (4 out of the 39 total excerpts in the pile). The table is organized in the same manner as the previous sample regarding tensions.

Margin Notes	Excerpts
Self-selected prof. texts	While I knew the instruction was not the best I could offer my students, I did not feel like I knew enough to create my own program that would meet all of their needs if I had been given complete freedom either, so I continued seeking resources to expand my understandings to support my students (Atwell, 2007; Beers, Probst, & Rief, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007).
Lens of possibilities	While reading <i>Mosaic of Thought</i> , I realized that the collaborative team they discussed is what an ideal professional school community would be like with deep discussions about students, research, and practice. Best of all, there was a sense that the teachers were meeting because they wanted to, because they were passionate about literacy, not because they had to or because they were being paid to do so.
Self-directed PD; social networking: blogging/prof. orgs	Often my self-directed professional development was related to adolescent literacy, as well as considerations related to the dual immersion context. I voraciously read books, mainly from Heinemann and Stenhouse, while I also learned from and/or collaborated with other educators through blogging, the English Companion Ning, and professional organizations.
Learn from students	<i>I still see you once in a while and I reflect on what you taught me about the dangers of placing kids in interventions based on test scores, rather than considering multiple sources of data.</i>

APPENDIX F

Sample of Interview Coding Process

The following is a sample of excerpts that I eventually added into a pile with the post-it label “literate lives” (4 out of the 11 total excerpts in the pile). The left hand side column includes name of the participant and the month of the interview, while the right hand side of the column includes the excerpt to which it referred.

Participant, Month	Excerpt from Interview Transcripts
Diana, April	No, I actually enjoyed it, but like I haven't found time to actually pick up a book to read for fun.
Renata, April	It kind of felt like last year when I used to read a lot more books than I do now.
Daniel, November	I read a lot at home just started to run out of books, so I've been re-reading books a lot.
David, April	I read like probably every week cause I get new magazines from ESPN so I just go read through those.

The following is a sample of excerpts that I eventually grouped into a pile with the post-it label “lack of choice/engagement (boredom sub-category)” (4 out of the 17 total excerpts in the pile). The table is organized in the same manner as the previous sample regarding literate lives.

Participant, Month	Excerpt from Interview Transcripts
Emiliano, April	Well, we were reading, not that long ago a book, <i>The Pearl</i> . I didn't like it. [...] It was just like cause it was like a folk tale and everything so we were learning about folk talks and things like that.
Diana, April	Oh, like it was this poem about a tree, like just explaining how it was a personification about a tree and like how it was coming and it was like seeing stuff. I don't know, it was weird.
David, November (Counter-example of boredom)	They're basically sometimes about sports and it will be like, we got done reading mythical heroes, and some heroes and all those heroes that we hear of for our heroes, so I kind of liked that.
Erika, December (Counter-lack of choice)	In this last book club we (my partner and I) got to choose which book to read.