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The Impact of Reading Intervention Supports on Adolescent Reader Identity

Erin Christine Doty

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The Impact of Reading Intervention Supports on Adolescent Reader Identity
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many people who have supported me along this journey. I am thankful for the teachers and administrators who have supported me, and for the students whom I have had the pleasure of serving. Lastly, I dedicated this to my children Leah, Matthew, and Caleb who have not only encourage me along the way, but also learned a great deal of independence as I pursued this goal.

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ABSTRACT

This case study research aimed to uncover how adolescent students describe their experiences with reading intervention and what aspects of their school experiences they see as contributing to their reader identity. Previous research done with or about adolescent students in reading intervention programs has demonstrated a need for a deeper understanding of students' perspectives of reading intervention and its impact on reader identity as well as an understanding of how these interventions position students as learners. Using a case study approach, data was collected with three eighth grade students who have participated in reading intervention programs for more than three years. Students' perspectives were explored through focus group discussions, individual interviews, and document analysis. Findings showed that the reader identities of these students varied by individual and were dependent upon their relationships with teachers, experiences with literacy, and their position in school and among their academic peers. This study has implications for practice such as how reading intervention programs are structured in the middle grades. Additionally, this study presents implications for future research aimed at understanding the connections between placing students in reading intervention programs and positioning them as struggling readers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAME

Frank Smith (1985) referred to reading as, “the most natural act in the world” (p.1). Scholars such as Smith (1976) and Goodman (1986) believe that children learn to read through the act of reading, and when they are provided with many opportunities in and out of school to experience reading firsthand, most will naturally acquire the skill. So, what happens when students do not reach the levels of reading achievement expected of them in school? Most elementary schools aim to address this problem through reading intervention programs that serve students in a variety of ways ranging from specialized reading curriculum and pull-out reading support to reading specialists who assist teachers and students in classrooms. However, many of the students who are labeled as struggling and supported through intervention during their elementary years, continue to carry that label when they reach middle school. This study seeks to understand the perspectives of these students in terms of reading support and their reader identities.

Background

“Struggling reader” is a term that has been used within the school system and applied to students who do not meet grade level expectations on a standardized measure of reading and/or do not perform as expected on school-based reading tasks. Moje et al. (2008) asserted that the term struggling reader is a catchphrase that has emerged in schools and is associated with adolescent readers while Lenski (2008) defined struggling

readers as those who, “have experienced difficulty with school-based reading” (p.38). Similarly, other scholars have described struggling readers as those who have not performed “at grade level” on school or state reading assessments (Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016; Frankel et al., 2019). While the term has begun to be questioned by educators and even replaced with terms such as “striving reader”, struggling reader is still largely used in the literature around reading intervention and is the term used to describe students served through the reading intervention program in the district where this research was conducted. Therefore, I have used the term throughout this report. However, one of the intentions of this study is to show that this term is not only applied to students inappropriately, but also serves to position students in ways that impact their reader identity. As Learned (2016) pointed out, “Analysis showed that students’ and teachers’ interactions with school contexts not only identified reading difficulty but also positioned youths as ‘struggling readers’ regardless sometimes, of demonstration of skill” (p. 1272). Similarly, Alvermann (2001) and Franzak (2006), wrote about the ways that students are positioned as struggling readers and the negative impact that positioning creates. Lastly, vanLangenhove and Harree’ (1999) refer to the term as one that is imposed upon students and based on instructional contexts and structures. In order to understand how and why the term struggling readers has become so widely used and applied in schools, it is important to understand how and why so many students are identified as needing reading support.

There are generally two schools of thought in the reading community regarding how people learn to read. One belief is that readers acquire the ability to read through a series of skills they are taught; while another belief asserts that reading ability is acquired

through the process of reading. Constance Weaver (2002) coined these two differing perspectives as, “a skills approach” or “a comprehensive literacy approach”. Those who ascribe to a skills approach to reading see a need for educators to teach students the specific skills such as letter sounds and symbols. Advocates of this approach explain that readers should learn these skills at the letter level and then piece them together to apply them to the reading process. In contrast, a comprehensive literacy approach combines phonemic awareness and understanding of letter sounds with learning to read at the word-level through the act of reading.

Because of the dichotomous nature of these two philosophies of reading, the field is both broad and lacking in understanding. There are varying perspectives on how to best serve struggling readers, and yet there is no agreed upon approach and often no solution at all. Historically, the majority of research on reading practices has been done from an adult perspective. “Very few studies address the nature of struggling readers from their own perspectives; that is, how struggling readers experience reading instruction” (Wiggs, 2012, p. 2). I do not think that it is a coincidence that the field of reading research and education has grappled with understanding how to support our struggling readers when we consider that, more often than not, we have left them out of the discussion. It is crucial that we begin to understand how our struggling readers view the reading process and their role in it so that we can gain insight into their circumstances and begin to understand how to support them to develop into the readers they are capable of being.

The role and purpose of reading intervention is to provide students who have been identified as struggling with intensive support so that they can meet grade level expectations. Reading Intervention is not intended to be long-term. Programs are

designed for students to move in and out of different levels of support as they need them with the aim being to move all students to grade level expectations (Buffum et al., 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher 2012). However, there are often students who are identified as needing additional support in elementary school who continue to need that support when they reach middle and even high school. In some cases, in spite of intensive support, students do not meet grade level reading proficiency year after year.

This phenomenon has, for many years, caused me to pause and made me wonder. What is truly going on with our students who are long-term recipients of reading intervention? These are students who receive intervention, are not identified as having a learning disability, but continue to be identified as needing support. It has caused me to wonder if we are perhaps treating the wrong symptom. Is the issue really reading or is there another underlying cause that is manifesting itself as a reading issue or perhaps our systems of support and methods of identification are flawed?

Statement of the Problem

Schools provide additional support to students that they identify as struggling, but there is little research to be found regarding how these students view themselves as readers or view the reading support they receive. Much of the research that has been done regarding struggling adolescent readers or reading instruction for struggling readers at the secondary level has centered around what teachers know and believe about reading instruction, what researchers know and believe about reading instruction, or what educators should do in regards to reading instruction. There is a missing piece of the puzzle in understanding these students, and that is understanding their perspectives.

A great deal of existing literature regarding struggling readers and reading intervention programs is focused on the teacher and the instructional strategies used for reading instruction. Much of this research is quantitative and utilizes reading assessments and other measurements of reading achievement to draw conclusions about struggling readers and the instruction they have received. Intrator and Kunzman (2014) wrote, “What is particularly missing from the research is the student perspective on teaching strategies” (p. 32). Additionally, they explained that even when student-voice is solicited, it is often not timely or individualized. Hall (2009) asserted at the time that there had been little research focusing on the role of identity and reading as it related to struggling readers specifically. In a similar way, McCarthy & Moje (2002) and Moje & Luke (2009) explained that there is little research examining the potential role that reading intervention plays in shaping students’ reader identities. Learned (2016) pointed out that this gap in the research is surprising when we consider the emerging consensus that identity matters in literacy development, and Frankel (2017) asserted that there is initial evidence suggesting that students enrolled in literacy intervention classes and assumed to be poor readers might benefit from reading instruction that addresses both their reading skills and their identities as readers. Considering the importance that these scholars have placed on identity and reading, it is clear that understanding students’ reader identities is an area of research that should be given further study and attention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to tell these students’ stories from their own perspectives in order to understand how they identify as readers. The study aimed to uncover how students describe their experiences with reading

intervention and what aspects of their school experience they see as contributing to their reader identity. These intentions as well as the research questions below are the basis for the methodologies and research approaches employed in this study.

Type of Study and Research Questions

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to data collection and analysis. Data was collected through individual and group interviews as well as student documents to address the three major research questions below:

Research Questions

1. How do adolescent readers in a reading intervention program present themselves as readers?
2. What do these students see as the major impacts on their reader identities?
3. How do students describe the reading support that they have received in reading intervention?

Significance of the Study

Because reading is a process that relies so heavily on a person's experience and perspectives, it is crucial to understand the process from the reader's perspective. If educators can better understand students' experiences with reading intervention, we will be able to find better ways to support these students as well as help to guide the teachers who work with them to support their needs. I do not intend for the specific findings of this study to be generalized to all students, but I do believe that what has been learned from these participants will help educators to think differently about how we serve and position our students whom we determine to need reading support. A deeper understanding of students' experiences with reading intervention and its impact on reader

identity has implications for practice such as how reading intervention programs are structured in the middle grades. Additionally, this study presents implications for future research aimed at understanding the connections between placing students in reading intervention programs and positioning them as struggling readers.

Definition of Terms

Reading Intervention: Techniques and services aimed at improving students' reading skills by increasing their decoding, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary skills. Students are provided intervention to supplement their regular reading instruction.

Response to Intervention (RTI): Multi-tiered approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Those children identified as needing additional support are provided with interventions and regularly progressed monitored to determine the effectiveness of the supports and interventions.

Book Club: The pullout reading support that the participants in this study received during their elementary school years. Book Club was a time when these students left their general education classroom to work with a reading specialist.

Literacy Lab: The title of the course that the participants in this study who received reading intervention support in middle school were scheduled into.

Middle Level Intervention: The title of the reading support program used in the school district where this research was done. In this school district reading support at the middle school level is not called RTI because it doesn't employ all aspects of RTI but does utilize some components as they fit into a middle school schedule.

Theoretical Perspectives

In seeking to understand the experiences and identities of adolescent readers in reading intervention programs, I ascribe to the belief that learning is socially and culturally mediated. We acquire knowledge and skills through our experiences with other people as well as through the contexts in which we live, work, and socialize. The specific habitus of each of these contexts serves to form aspects of our identity. I believe that for the students who are the focus of this research, the identities that they hold both in and out of school are crucial factors in understanding their perspectives and experiences with reading.

How one comes to understand or create new learning from what they have read is dependent upon the knowledge and experiences that they bring to the text. This construction, rooted in identity, is often personal and individualized. In order to represent the stories of adolescent readers, it is necessary to explore who they are and what they believe about their knowledge and understanding as readers. Therefore, I used an application of identity theories to explore identity as a construct, and the ways that we use identity to construct meaning to guide the study. These theoretical perspectives are explored as tenants of social constructivism which serve as an overarching theoretical concept.

Literacy as a Social Practice

The overarching theoretical frame for this study subscribes to the belief that literacy is socially situated (Street, 1984). The most basic tenets of constructivism assert that knowledge is formed within the learner; learning is connected to personal experiences; and learning is a social activity that is enhanced by interactions with others.

Specifically, social constructivism sets the stage for sociocultural learning theories and their connections to literacy learning. Au (1998) explained that social constructivism encompasses ideas such as, “active engagement in processes of meaning-making, text comprehension, and the varied nature of knowledge, especially knowledge developed as a consequence of membership in a given social group” (p.299). She also asserted that Vygotsky believed all mental processes were connected to, signs, tools, or instruments and language and writing systems are paramount among these. The forms of language and literacy that a culture develops reflect the experiences of that group of people and these experiences are further formed when children begin to use language and literacy. She went on to explain, “In the case of literacy research, the social can include historical changes in definitions of literacy, functions and uses of literacy within communities, and the social construction of success and failure in learning to read in school, to name a few” (Au, 1998, p. 300). Au’s discussion of the “social construction of success and failure in learning to read in school” speaks volumes to what I sought to uncover with this research.

The purpose and intention behind this study was to understand students’ experiences with reading from their own perspectives and to understand how their identities play a role in how they have come to understand themselves as readers. I see, too often, students who have received many years of reading support continue to be labeled by our school system as struggling readers. In my work with these students, I have learned that there is a dichotomy between what these students know and are able to do as readers and what their test scores continue to say about them as readers. I believe this dichotomy is created by a standardized approach to reading and writing that does not account for students’ individual experiences and backgrounds. My perspective aligns

with the notion that reading and writing are not defined as a set of specific skills to be taught and learned, but rather as a set of social practices for making meaning with text, specific to particular social contexts. Children are gradually exposed to these practices by the people around them and through their engagement in important social and cultural activities (Gee, 2003). Drawing heavily on Vygotsky's theories of development and learning, the sociocultural perspective of literacy development recognizes the unconventional understandings that young children develop through their interactions and provides important cues to their thinking about reading and writing (Schwanenflugel & Knapp, 2016). By emphasizing the natural literary contexts and activities in which young children participate prior to entering school or engaging with formal literacy instruction, researchers in this tradition focus on adult-child interactions around literacy, particularly in the home and community, and the functions of literacy in and across those interactions (Heath, 1983).

These experiences are critical to the formation and continued development of a person's identity. It is, then, this identity that informs our understanding of what we experience. One's individual perspective and understanding comes from their sociocultural transactions with others. Meaning is developed as learners experience text, and those experience are unique to each person. Therefore, a standardized approach to reading does not align with what we know about reading when sociocultural theories and the importance of identity are considered. Through Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1995) explained that the meaning of text is not created until a reader reads it and constructs that meaning for themselves. Therefore, a literary work does not have one inherent meaning; meaning is dependent upon the reader's interpretation. Tyson (2001)

explained that, “readers play an active role in making meaning when they read” (p.13). Reader Response Theory defines our understanding of the relationship between reader and text and gives way to the consideration of identity as an important factor in the reading process.

Identity and Position

This study is framed by theories of identity (Holland et al., 1998) and positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990). Using a similar theoretical approach as Frankel et al. (2018) in their study with 12th-grade literacy mentors and Frankel (2016) in her study of identity and positioning in two high school reading intervention classes, this study sought to apply positioning and identity theories within literacy settings to examine how students are positioned as readers within the school contexts and examine how they identify themselves as readers. Moje and Luke (2009) termed this approach as *identity as position*. A theory of *identity as position* asserts that: (a) identities are social and situated within activities and relationships to others, (b) are fluid and based upon contexts, and (c) are both assigned to individuals and accepted by those individuals (Davies & Harre’, 1990; Moje & Luke, 2009). *Identity as position* is important for understanding how participants have been positioned as inexperienced, poor, or and/or struggling readers by their placement in a literacy intervention class.

Identity as a social construct and more specifically as a theoretical perspective is not a simple concept to define. There are many different theories of identity (McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Moje, Luke et al., 2009; Hall, 2012). In their review of *literacy-and-identity* studies, Moje et al. (2009) asserted that the bulk of identity theorizes three main aspects of identity. It is social; it is fluid; and it is recognized. Yet, they contend that it is not as

simple as seeing identity through these three constructions. We must also understand that identity can be conceptualized in a variety of ways. The five conceptions of identity outlined in their review are: “(1) difference, (2) sense of self/subjectivity, (3) mind or consciousness, (4) narrative, and (5) position” (p.419). While each of these concepts hold valuable insights into the exploration of identity, for the purposes of this research, I will focus on the ways that identity is both social and fluid through the conceptions of difference and position as a foundation for understanding these adolescent readers.

In her study with sixth grade readers whose identities were examined in relation to their discussions of reading comprehension and reading levels, Hall (2012) found that student’s individual identities were shaped by their understanding of their environments as well as how they view themselves in terms of the norms of those environments. Hall’s findings not only demonstrate the social component of identity formation but highlight what Moje et al. (2009) described as the both position and difference. “Identity from the metaphor of difference is always articulated to group membership” (p. 420). When students see their identities as shaped by the norms of their environments, it is clear that they recognize how their participation in certain groups defines them. Additionally, their roles within these groups determine the position they hold which serves to further define their identity. Moje et al. (2009) described conception of position as an aspect of identity that demonstrates the impact that others have in our identity formation. They asserted that literacy roles and school practices play a part in agency as students are acutely aware of the positions that they hold in relation to others. Other scholars (Urrieta, 2007; Hatt, 2007; Hall, 2012; Enriquez, 2014) also explained that students clearly understand their

position within the school environment and describe the effect this has on their development of a school identities.

Another component of identity that is crucial is its subjectivity. Identity is not static, but rather context-dependent (Holland, et al., 1998; Hall, 2009; Enriquez, 2014) as people move across different social contexts, they are positioned differently and therefore take on different identities. Individuals can have multiple identities that shift depending on the context they are in and the goals they are trying to achieve. The identity that an adolescent reader assumes at school may be very different from one they assume in their social interactions or with their family. “The resistant reader is sometimes resistant but sometimes compliant and other times engaged.” (Moje et al., 2009, p. 418). In terms of the research conducted for my study, the context of school identity and the ways that group dynamics and positioning help students to form an identity will be the most relevant. There are three components of identity that I believe are relevant in exploring how positioning in terms of school context has an impact. Those areas are: school identity, Figured Worlds, and positionality.

School Identity. “Students’ conceptualizations of what it means to be a good reader are constructed at an early age” (Hall, 2012, p. 242). The identity that a student takes as either a good reader or a poor reader is one that can have lasting effects on their self-efficacy, beliefs about learning, motivation to read, and overall academic achievement. “Literacy plays an important role in the development of adolescents’ individual and social identities. Readers act upon cues from what they read and how they perform in school to shape their emerging sense of self” (Moje et al., 2000, p. 402). Hatt (2007) defined academic identity as the ways that people “understand ourselves within

and in relation to the institution of schooling and how it shapes our own perceptions of efficacy, ability, and success in relation to academics” (p. 146). Students’ participation in certain groups or certain classes as well as the positions they hold in those organizations are crucial aspects of identity formation. These spaces that students inhabit can be characterized as what Holland et al. (1998) theorize as Figured Worlds.

Figured Worlds. Holland et al. (1998) asserted that identities are produced in the process of participating in the activities of a Figured World. Figured Worlds are spaces where people figure out who they are through the activities and social relationships of the environment (Holland et al, 1998; Urrieta, 2007; Hatt, 2007; Moje et al., 2009). In Figured Worlds people or “figures” play certain roles that are recognized in relation to one another. The attention is on the ways that people participate in these worlds on a daily basis. The Figured Worlds impact is an important concept for studying identity and agency (Urrieta, 2007). People are often positioned in society by gender class, race, smart, struggling, etc. Holland et al. (1998) explained that:

Figured worlds rest upon people’s abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized “as if” realms. What if gender relations were defined as that women had to worry about whether they were attractive?... What if there were a world called academia where books were so significant that people would sit for hours on end, away from friends and family writing them? (p. 49)

They went on to explain that people’s identities and agency are formed in these “as if” worlds. So, what if reading achievement was measured by a standardized assessment and determined one’s position in the world of school? What impact would this have on students’ identity formation and their use of that identity to make sense of their learning?

Hatt (2007) argued that “Smartness operates as a Figured World that shapes how ability is talked about and thought about in schools and larger society” (p. 149), and Urrieta (2007) asserted:

In figured worlds people are ordered and ranked and power is distributed. All the members of the Honors track at a local high school for example have a positive academic identity and are positioned as smart. But, not everyone within this figured world has an equal claim at being considered smart, because some members consider themselves, and are considered by their peers to be smarter than others. (p. 121)

Students are positioned within each of the Figured Worlds that they inhabit. The Figured World of school often shapes identities by determining what is considered smart and socially reproducing that label through structures and discourse. As struggling readers navigate their school contexts, they are cast into social positions. By either accepting or rejecting these positions, they assume identities position themselves in relationship to others (Davies & Harre’, 1990; Davies, 2008). Similarly, Learned (2016) explained that it is “system-wide contexts that make apparent, if not produce learning difficulty” (p.1274). She asserted that practices such as institutional processes for tracking students, school discipline, and literacy intervention are practices that position students as struggling. The positions, then, that students are assigned or sometimes that they assume within their figured worlds, have a lasting impact on their identity and achievement.

Positioning. Positioning Theory is a social constructionist approach that first began to emerge in the 1980’s in the area of gender relations. Psychologist Wendy

Holloway was one of the first scholars to explore how people negotiate their gender-related positions within conversation. In addition, social psychologists, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell as well as psychologists, Rom Harré and Bronwyn Davies, and sociologist, Luk Van Langenhove are most often seen as the founders of Positioning Theory.

Positioning Theory explains the positions or roles that people assume in discourse. While its roots are found in psychological theory, it is more regularly being applied in social situations such as classrooms to understand the ways that classroom discourse takes place and the dynamics surrounding students' interactions with each other and their teachers. Holland et al., 1998 wrote about both positioning oneself and taking up positions. Both ideas rely on the notion that people are positioned in relation to others. Factors such as social behavior, status, and conversational speech serve as determiners for a person's position. Van Langenhove and Harre' (1994) explain:

One can position oneself or be positioned as e.g. powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, dominant or submissive, definite or tentative and so on. A

'position' can be specified by reference to how a speaker's contributions are hearable with respect to these and other polarities of character, and sometimes even of role. (p. 466)

The role or position a person plays in relation to others can be determined by their own self-positioning or by deliberate positioning from others. A person can be positioned as quiet, loud, compliant, smart, struggling, and so by the ways they choose to interact with others socially or by the ways that others perceive them in social interactions. Because these positions that people assume are directly related to character traits that are

either perceived or actually present, positioning within a social setting can have a direct impact on the ways that students experience their own identities.

Identity is not only about how a person sees themselves but also how they are positioned by those around them (Holland et al., 1998; & Moje, 2002; Hatt, 2007; Hall, 2009; Urrieta, 2007). This is a crucial concept when considering the structures of our American school system. Hatt (2007) discussed the ways that some students conform to behavioral expectations, achieve high grades, take honors level courses or achieve high scores on standardized tests while there are students with marginal identities who are “framed as troublemakers, slow learners, and/or misfits” (p.157). She went on to explain that these identities are framed within what schools determine to be “legitimate identities” (p. 157). Legitimate identities within a school are often given to those students who play school well. Those who comply with rules, follow directions, complete assignments, and obtain decent grades.

The ways that individual teachers and school respond to misbehavior is one of the many ways that schools position students as good or bad students. These labels can have a lasting impact on student achievement. In their study of students who were expelled or suspended from school, Fabelo et al. (2011) found that these students were more likely to be retained at least one grade level or stop attending school altogether. Other scholars (Learned, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014) also reported the detrimental effects of suspension and expulsion and examined the overrepresentation of minority students in exclusionary discipline. Learned (2016) examined how struggling secondary readers along with their teachers co-constructed systems that conflated reading difficulty with behavior problems. Her study documented the ways that participants’ interactions in reading intervention

contexts and their school discipline tended to position them as deficient readers and deviant young people.

Literacy can be an important factor in positioning students with a “legitimate” school identity. There is a great deal of power associated with literacy that involves the ways that certain ideas and skills are valued over others (Street, 2005). Those students who possess the reading and writing skills that are valued in school find themselves positioned to be successful. Those students whose skills and knowledge may be less valued by traditional school norms are often positioned as struggling. Enriquez (2014) wrote about the position of struggling readers as, “a seemingly fixed and essentialized identity that dictates what they were able to do as readers and thereby restricting possibilities for them to be viewed otherwise” (p. 117). The value placed on the knowledge that students possess are not only an important aspect of their positioning but also a crucial part of what allows them to access the curriculum and make meaning as readers.

Theoretical Distinctions

The theoretical frame for this study relies heavily on the idea that literacy is both impacted by and impacts identity. In this section, I have explored three ways of viewing identity in relation to literacy: through one’s school identity, through Figured Worlds, and through positioning. Each of these perspectives has connections to the research done in this study. When considering Holland et al. (1998) use of Figured Worlds as a way to understand how students grapple with the operating rules and roles of their Figured Worlds as well as how each student may view and negotiate the same Figured World differently, I see clear implications to my research. The way that one participant views

their Figured World can be much different than another. This was evident in the data I collected with my participants. Similarly, the way that students are positioned explores how each individual is affected by others and by each context. These positions greatly impact students understanding of their identity.

While each of these constructs played a role in my researching of relevant literature and my thinking throughout the data collection and analysis, the idea of positioning emerged as a stronger theoretical frame for this study. The ways that the participants in this study have been positioned as struggling readers and the practices that have served to position them are critical concepts in understanding their reader identities as well as for the implications gleaned from this research.

Conclusion

Reading is a crucial part of the way we communicate as a society. Being able to read a variety of texts and use the information gleaned from them is necessary for all aspects of life. So, it is not surprising that reading achievement continues to be a topic of discussion and research. Schools continue to look for ways to ensure that all students are reading “on grade level” and meeting the expectations set by state and local entities for reading achievement. Many encounter frustration or concern when they are unable to “reach” all of their readers by ensuring that every one of them has met the necessary benchmark.

At the same time, all students feel the importance of being able to be themselves and connect with other people who seem to understand their life experience. They seek social and academic support and acceptance. When we take these ideas into account, it becomes obvious that we need to understand our readers, their experiences, and the

identities that they have formed in relation to reading in order to help them grow in the knowledge and skills necessary to read in the ways that will be required for adulthood.

School structures and contexts play a huge role in how students' form their identity. Institutional positioning (van Langenhove & Harre, 1999) occurs when institutions such as schools classify certain people in certain ways. Frankel (2016), explained that the institutional positioning of students in literacy intervention classrooms positions them as struggling readers. She pointed out, however, that positive relationships with teachers can help students to, may “reinforce or reject institutionally imposed positions such as those related to perceived reading ability” (p. 504). This is an important factor in beginning to understand what factors are necessary for supporting these students.

By choosing to study students who have been long-term participants in reading intervention programs, this study examined the ways that students' have formed their reader identities and the impact that those identities have had or continue to have on their academic achievement and beliefs about themselves as readers. In seeking to understand the impact that those supports have had on their reading identities, one goal of this work is to gain some understanding of how to support readers similar to those described in this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adolescence is often described as a trying and difficult time in a person's life. A time "in between" (Christenbury et al., 2014) when young people are grappling with who they are and who they want to become. There are varying views on the ages that constitute adolescence with some educators asserting that adolescence begins as early as 10 years of age and extending throughout the teen years. When looking at adolescents from an instructional view, the divisions of grade levels designed by typical American school systems help us to recognize adolescence as students attending secondary schools, typically grades 6-12 or grade levels where disciplinary division is common. Moje et al. (2000) wrote that, "...baggage comes with the terms secondary reading and content reading that limit how we think about literacy in middle and secondary schools" (p. 401). It is important to understand that adolescents have unique needs and circumstances not only from an emotional and social viewpoint as we often see discussed, but from an instructional and academic stance as well. While, research that looks specifically at middle school students in the context of reading intervention and their reader identities is limited (Frankel, 2016), I have reviewed literature regarding the history and trends of adolescent literacy practices, the role that identity and experience play in reading, the prevalence of struggling adolescent readers, and the ways that secondary schools attempt to intervene to provide reading support for these students. The findings from my review are detailed in this section.

Definition of Reading

Being literate is usually defined as the ability to read or write at a simple level in at least one language (Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016), and people who are able to read and write or having knowledge or competence are considered literate (Christenbury et al., 2014). It is evident that reading is a crucial aspect of literacy.

As previously described, there are varying views among scholars as to what the reading process entails as well as how to best teach someone to read. Is reading about cognition or is it about experience? Enriquez (2014) believes that, “reading involves much more than a cognitive process” (p. 117). I would argue that reading involves both, and it is crucial for educators to recognize that. Frankel et al. (2019) described reading as something that, “involves passion and knowledge. It is about who you are and who you want to become” (p. 224). This view of reading emphasizes the role that identity and experience play in the reading process and highlights the importance of the reader’s ability to construct ideas. Street (2005) defined literacy practices as, “the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (p. 419), and Hall (2012) explained that comprehension involves the use of skills and cognitive processes, yet it is also a social and cultural phenomenon as students’ lives and experiences shape their understanding of text. While Moje et al. (2008) asserted that, “Reading is the result of an intricate intersection of learner knowledge and interest, textual factors, and social, cultural, and disciplinary factors” (p. 5). As these scholars pointed out, the ideas that a reader is able to construct during the process are rooted in experiences that are both social and academic. It is this construction of ideas that creates the meaning a reader extracts from a text.

Language is closely tied to identity and does not exist outside of a sociocultural context. “Teachers should recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is ‘wrong’ or even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family” (Delpit, 1998, p. 19). When reading is valued in terms of the reader's ability to correctly pronounce or accurately recite words in a standardized form of language, the diverse linguistic skills and cultural background of the reader are largely ignored.

This view that one form of English is standard over all others is not a new notion and is widely accepted as the basis for the instruction of reading in American schools. English-language arts standards in most states are built upon the principle of a standardized form of English being taught and tested. It is this standardized form of American English (SAE) that provides linguistic capital for those who speak it, read it, and write it well. “The dominance of standard English is a culturally constructed phenomenon intimately linked to the ways that power is distributed in our society” (Compton-Lilly, 2005, p. 50). When we recognize and celebrate one form of English over all others, it serves only to demoralize those whose language varies from that form in any way.

In addition, it is this kind of thinking about language that makes it more difficult for readers with diverse linguistic backgrounds to feel comfortable and confident in their ability as readers. It is this narrow view of what reading should be that causes many students from diverse linguistic backgrounds to be labeled as falling behind or struggling readers. This misunderstanding of reading misrepresents readers skills and abilities and

fails to recognize that reading is socially constructed. No readers make meaning from text in isolation. All readers rely on both pragmatic and linguistic systems to comprehend text. When readers are utilizing linguistic systems, they rely on semantics, syntax, and graphophonic information, to understand text. Pragmatic systems are also tapped into when readers consider the context of the situation, background knowledge, and culture (Moore & Gilles, 2014). When we understand how these language systems work in conjunction during the reading process, we begin to understand the important role that culture and linguistic background serve. When we fail to recognize both systems, we leave out a fundamental part of the reading process. Personal experience, culture, and background knowledge are essential components of reading. Educators need to recognize both the cultural background and linguistic experiences that readers possess and use to make meaning as they read.

To view reading as a meaning-making process (Rosenblatt, 1968; Goodman, 1986; Weaver, 1996; Smith, 2006) we have to recognize that it is rooted in a constructivist approach to learning. These scholars have asserted that people learn to read by reading. They believed that the experiences that each person has and brings to the text are the basis for that meaning-making. If that is true, it is impossible to consider reading outside of the social and cultural experiences that a person has, and therefore, those experiences must be considered as a part of reading. This is the view of reading that frames the research of this dissertation.

Literacy and Identity

Identity plays an important role in educating our students. Learning at any age is directly linked to our social identities. The identity that one assumes at any given time is dependent upon both context and social relationships (Street, 2005). This is arguably even more prominent a reality for adolescent learners whose identities are rapidly changing as they seek to figure out who they will become. It could be argued that one of the most influential periods in a person's life is during their adolescent years. The time between a person's childhood and adulthood, often their middle and high school years, has a profound impact on their development as human beings. A large part of that development is influenced by their time spent in school.

The experiences that an adolescent learner has while in school shape their understanding of themselves. Classroom discourse and social interactions play an important role in positioning students. Anderson (2009) wrote, "In classrooms, we are located culturally and historically as learners who are certain kinds of people with trajectories of knowing and being" (p. 294). How adolescents are positioned through their own view of self as well as the way others see them, impacts both their social and academic identities. Traditional classroom materials and activities, as well as powerful classroom discourses, often fail to recognize the possibilities for students to obtain desirable identities (Menard-Warwick, 2007; Hatt, 2007; Anderson, 2009; Intrator & Kunzman, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2017). Additionally, Yamakawa et al. (2005) explained:

Whether consciously or not, teachers have temporary control over the social positions of their students, and their power influences both the dynamics of and social relations within a classroom community. As classrooms become more

student-centered and communication-rich, teachers need to be aware of their inevitable positioning and its long-term influence on their students. (p. 20)

It is crucial for educators to consider how each and every student is positioned through their social experiences within the classroom and within the school as a whole. They must understand why the experiences of some students are not equitable to those of others. Through educational practices such as tracking and ability grouping, high-stakes standardized assessments, and standardized curriculum, our school system often positions these students as struggling learners or academically challenged while failing to recognize or understand the skills and knowledge they possess that differs from what schools expect of them.

“Researchers have used positioning theory as an analytical lens to understand school-based literacy practices in the areas of coaching and teaching, teaching and learning, and collaborating in literacy communities” (Frankel et al., 2018, p.448). My review of literature focused on how positioning of students in reading intervention programs has influenced their reader identity. Kim and Viesca (2016) studied middle school reading intervention teachers to examine the ways that they positioned their emergent bilingual students and the practices that they used to motivate them. They found that teachers’ own personal histories and experiences played some role in how they positioned students within their classrooms. Their study pointed out the importance of teachers’ understanding of how identity impacts positioning. Skerrett (2012) examined the context of reading intervention with middle school students to understand its impact on their reader identity. He found that for one female, Mexican-American student, her identity was reshaped in a positive way as a result of participation in reading intervention.

In contrast, other studies have found that positioning has had a negative impact on students' reader identities (Frankel, 2016 & 2018). These studies asserted that reading intervention support often positions students in ways that were not in line with their actual reading ability. Similarly, Enciso (2011) examined standardized assessments which were often used to identify students for placement in reading intervention negatively positioned students. Learned (2016) expanded this area of study to look at how students enrolled in reading intervention classes were positioned across the school setting. She found a connection between behavior problems and reading performance that positioned students as deficit readers regardless of their reading ability. While the findings of these studies vary slightly, there is a consensus that the participation in reading intervention programs does have an impact on students' reader identity.

Haddix et al. (2017) asserted that what schools often perceive as a literacy gap is in reality a cultural gap. In their view, there is a misinterpreting of students' abilities measured through standardized practices such as assessments and curricula that is not designed to consider all students. They explained, "There exists an assumption that if a student does not display literacy proficiencies on school-sanctioned tasks, he or she is somehow not literate" (p. 31). Much of the research that focuses on representing the perspectives and experiences of traditionally underrepresented or marginalized students explores the perception that students believe their particular identities are absent in the curriculum (Intrator & Kunzman, 2014; Haddix et al., 2017; Frankel et al., 2019). While troubling, this assertion is not a new idea.

In 1983 Shirley Brice Heath studied the language development of children living in two closely-situated, working-class communities from 1969 to 1978. In her

ethnography, *Ways with Words*, she described the community of Roadville which was predominantly composed of white residents and the community of Trackton was predominantly black. In tracing the children's language development Heath exposed fundamental questions about the nature of language development, the effects of literacy on oral language habits, and the sources of communication problems in schools and workplaces. She discovered that while the children from the two communities came to school with varying language backgrounds and dialectic speech patterns, all students were equally skilled in developing language and reading skills. However, the children from Roadville were viewed as having advantages over those from Trackton because their skills and dialect were more valued by the school system. In her epilogue, Heath explained the importance of breaking down “boundaries between classrooms and communities”, and she discussed the importance of valuing “cultural patterns”.

Heath’ findings as well as the work of Michaels (1982) and Snow (1983) show us that schools have historically held certain expectations about language use in schools. Children who come from communities where language use is different from the school’s expectations are often viewed as being disadvantaged. Students’ abilities to measure up to the language expectations in school is one way that we see adolescents being positioned as learners. Through their study of adolescent readers, Moje et al. (2008) found that students like to read books about, “people like them, and not only in terms of race, ethnicity, age, class and gender. They also like to identify with characters who are resilient through struggle, people who are working through relationships, people trying to figure out who they are” (p.3). Adolescent readers want to read books and write texts that offer them social capital in the form of information and ideas. Enriquez (2014) explained

this as the ways that people incorporate their social context with their understanding of literature. These social contexts often have their own norms and values when it comes to literacy. The forms of literacy that are common or valued outside of school are not always closely aligned with what is deemed traditional reading and writing in schools. However, reading and writing outside of school impacts adolescents' literacy development in school. Social networks, relationships, and identity development are all aspects of literacy development. Adolescents read because they are part of social groups or because they are in search of role models or information (Moje et al., 2008). These experiences should be considered important aspects of reading instruction.

Adolescent Literacy

Reading is not a neutral process. It is not simply about pronouncing words on a page or even remembering their meanings. When a person reads something, their interpretation and the meaning that they gain from it is based on their personal experiences and their ability to make connections to the content. Goodman (2005) determined that there is one single process used by all readers, both proficient and not, for understanding text. Because all readers use the same processes, any variances in understanding or meaning come from a reader's individual experience with the text. He believed that:

The difference in these readers' ability to comprehend is influenced by their previous instruction in reading, their concept of reading, the strategies they use, the value they place on reading, the use they make of their language and cultural background, their opportunities to read, the time given to reading, their purpose and motivation for reading, the situational context of their reading, the

supportiveness of the texts they encounter, and the flexibility with which they read the text. (p.5)

A reader's individual experiences impact his or her interpretation of text, but schools often impose a standardized view of reading and reading tasks that do not always account for individualized perspectives and experiences. School reading experiences are traditionally those that assume a literate learner to be one who can read and write at what is deemed "grade level". This level of competency is determined by standardized assessments and curricular measures such as a student's ability to read from a textbook and answer comprehension questions about what they have read. These standardized measures assume that, "...the [assessment] questions are uniquely capable of producing information about what students do and do not understand about what they have read" (Christenbury et al., 2010, p. 6). In addition, traditional school reading approaches refer to experiences such as reading text from a printed book or article and writing in response to that text in the form of analytical essays, informational reports, and text-dependent responses. While these proficiencies are important aspects of literacy learning, these measures do not consider a broader understanding of how adolescent learners experience reading or the many ways that they are exposed to various types of texts. This narrow view of reading often adopted by schools fails to recognize the literacy practices that many students engage in outside of school. Smagorinsky (2017) wrote:

Extensive interviews with teenage boys found that they find the dry, dull reading assigned in schools to be repellant, and the isolating practices of schools to work against their desire to work on projects with friends. In contrast, the boys undertook reading for personal knowledge and interest outside of school with

vigor, particularly when it helped them with hobbies and pursuits such as playing video games. (p.209)

For students like the adolescent boys described in Smagorinsky's research, the literacy practices that they experience at school are out of line with the literacy practices that they experience in other areas of their lives. Moje (2017) explained that students often learn to hide their home discourses and literacies in order to follow the norms of classroom routines and the expectations of the teacher. Students whose home literacy experiences fail to match the experiences and expectations at school can lead to them being positioned as struggling learners or underachieving students. When our school literacy practices are short sighted and fail to consider students' social and cultural experiences, we run the risk of assigning identities to students that position them in negative ways. Much of the current research in adolescent literacy practices explores the importance of understanding students' daily literacy experiences outside of school and making them an integral part of their classroom experience.

Moje et al. (2000) believed that adolescence is. "a legitimate and vital stage of development that deserves our attention and respect" (p.4). Additionally, Moje (2002) argued that adolescent literacy is an under researched and underrepresented area in the field of literacy research. She believes that educators should pay attention to adolescents, in part to support them in constructing successful and happy adult lives, but also to study how they learn the increasingly complex literacy practices that are required for different disciplines and how they reinvent literacies to navigate their social worlds.

The literacy demands and specifically the demand of reading that are expected of adolescent students are often more complex than what are traditionally considered as

school-based literacy activities. Adolescents are required to navigate multiple literacies both in and out of school (Moje et al., 2000; Street, 2005; Moje et al., 2008), yet schools do not always recognize the many facets of literacy learning that are social, cultural, or gender related. This model of reading fails to recognize the contexts and other factors that are crucial in a reader's ability to become engaged in what they read (Street, 2005).

Alvermann (2014) explained that, the prevalent approach to literacy instruction for the schools in the United States, "views reading and writing as neutral processes" (p.15).

This approach does not take into consideration an understanding of personal experience, identity, or the diversity of reading and writing. It assumes a universal set of reading and writing skills for understanding printed text (Street, 2005; Alvermann, 2014;

Christenbury et al., 2014). This view of reading posits that teaching students reading strategies and practicing reading skills will improve a reader's performance in all situations. It is a view of reading that is often seen in reading intervention programs that seek to raise all students' achievement to "grade level" expectations. Hall (2012) extended this thinking to explain that students' identities within this approach are created, "solely on skills, what they can or cannot do, with little attention to the social and cultural factors that can shape their reading development" (p. 243).

In contrast, an approach to reading that is focused solely on skills, Street (2005) described an approach that is more culturally sensitive and posits that literacy practices vary by context. This perspective emphasizes cultural meanings and power dimensions of the reading and writing process. It recognizes, as Frankel et al. (2019) explained, "...prior research has indicated that adolescent readers come to their classrooms with a diversity of experiences with reading and perspectives on what it means to be a reader" (p. 224). To

understand the full picture of an adolescent reader, we must consider that they bring different skills and knowledge to the classroom and the differences should be recognized as strengths.

Demands of Secondary Schools. “The structure of secondary schools, then, introduces complexity to literacy learning and use and thus offers the possibility for studying how people make sense of the school-based disciplines and the literacy practices privileged in them” (Moje, 2002, p. 220). The complexity of literacy learning within secondary schools is framed by three important ideas that highlight its uniqueness: discrete content area literacy learning, the use of standardized assessments to level students by ability, and adolescents’ need to exert agency on their learning.

One of the challenges that adolescent literacy learners face is the demands of content area reading and writing. For the first time in their educational careers, students find themselves attending separate classes where each content is treated as its own unique set of skills and practices, often with little connection between the subject areas. While there are literacy demands within each content area, it is rare that expectations and instruction are consistent or integrated. Additionally, adolescent literacy learning requires a shift in the demand of expectations from predominantly narrative to expository and informational text (Mills, 2010). Alvermann (2014) wrote, “...young people in secondary school are expected to participate in the discourses of the disciplines, to incorporate these discourses into other discourses and identities they experience throughout their secondary school day” (p. 4). This underscore both the importance and complexity of literacy within our secondary schools. Teachers of all contents have become increasingly responsible for helping adolescents to acquire important reading skills. However, many secondary content

area teachers are uncomfortable with reading instruction in their content (Moje et al., 2000). This often leaves our adolescent learners struggling to make necessary connections between the literacy skills that they acquire across the disciplines.

Another important factor that we must understand about adolescents' experiences with literacy at the secondary level is the role that assessments play. "In today's schools, adolescents are the most tested group of young people in history..." (Christenbury et al., 2014, p.5). Assessments are often used at the secondary level to place students in level courses that are arranged by ability or achievement. Students may be placed in honors courses if their test scores show that they have an aptitude for a certain type of learning or for a particular content area. Similarly, students whose test scores do not demonstrate a strength, are often placed in what might be deemed grade level courses. Lastly, we see students whose performance on standardized assessments to be considered below grade level to be identified for remedial or intervention level courses. The level of coursework that a student is exposed to as well as the expectations for learning are often very different for each of these levels, and students receiving instruction through a remedial course may not be afforded the same type of instruction as someone in a "higher" level course, perpetuating their placement at that level.

One of the main issues with the use of assessments to level students is that these assessments "...assume that the questions are uniquely capable of producing information about what students do and do not understand about what they have read" (Christenbury et al., 2014, p.6). These scholars went on to explain that many researchers who view reading from a transactional perspective explain that students may find meaning in their reading that is quite different from what a test designer, teacher, or researcher might

consider important. The use of assessments in such a high-stakes and definitive manner ends up positioning students in ways that are beyond their control. Adolescent readers recognize the positions that they hold within the structure of school and are keenly aware of what it means to be seen as smart or struggling. “Throughout their years of formal education, students are saturated with countless messages about what readers do and what it means to be a reader—that is, what it means to take on the identity of one who is viewed as participating in reading at school” (Moje et al., 2008, p. 105).

The way that students are positioned at school has a direct impact on the ways that they feel they are able to exercise their agency. Adolescence is a time when young people are discovering who they are and where they fit into the world around them. As such, learning to use their unique voices and talents is an important part of adolescent development. In their research, Frankel et al. (2019) found that students articulated many connections between agency and reading. In summary their findings showed that students reported that reading means finding yourself and your way, managing your goals and making mistakes, being different from other readers, having confidence and autonomy as a reader, and asking for help when needed. These findings demonstrate that adolescent readers desire to be active learners who see themselves in the curriculum and instruction that they experience rather than to be passive receivers of information. Positioning students solely on the basis of assessment results leaves out a huge part of who students are as readers and learners. Moje et al. (2000) found that, “adolescents need spaces in schools to explore and experiment with multiple literacies and to receive feedback from peers and adults. Schools advocating only school-sanctioned literacy do not currently provide such spaces.” (p. 402). An important aspect of providing adolescent literacy

learners with the support they need is recognizing their interests as well as what they value and why.

Engaging Adolescents in Reading. When the content being presented is of interest to the reader, adolescents are highly motivated to engage in both reading and completing activities associated with reading even if the requirements are challenging (Moje et al., 2008; Frankel et al., 2019). Motivation has been studied by many (Moje et al., 2000; Moje et al., 2008; Intrator & Kunzman, 2014; Howard & Ryan, 2018; Gilson, Beach & Cleaver, 2018; Frankel et al., 2019) as an important factor in the reading process for adolescent learners. Motivation is often regarded as something that those who are deemed struggling readers lack and therefore, a conclusion is drawn. If struggling readers were more motivated to read, they would be better readers. However, there are many factors that contribute to reading motivation. Gilson et al (2018) explained that several researchers have studied what and why adolescents choose to read, and the major factors include, “how much they value reading; their self-concept as readers; their control over reading materials; having access to interesting materials; and influence of family and friends” (p. 506). Here we see that what causes someone to be motivated to read is not simple. There are many reasons and most often they are personal and social. An ongoing concern is how often these factors that influence motivation are considered in the school setting.

Data from a variety of studies showed that adolescent students often report being bored and disengaged in school (Intrator & Kunzman, 2014, Christenbury, 2014, Smagorinsky, 2017, Gilson et al., 2018). This has particularly dire implications for students who are already marginalized such as our students who we have labeled as

struggling readers. In their large-scale research study conducted with predominantly adolescent Latino learners in a large Midwestern city, Moje et al (2008) concluded that youth do read and write outside of school but they may not read and write the kinds of texts that adults value”. Christenbury et al. (2014) explained the importance of teachers listening carefully to students and what matters to them, “Only by listening carefully to the qualities and causes of the disengagement can educators consider how the intended curriculum-and more importantly the implementation-needs to change.” (p. 38). Student-teacher relationships are an important aspect of reader motivation. Adolescents report looking to their teachers and other adults in the school setting as sources of affirmation and acceptance, and it is teachers who most often provide students with the books they choose (Intrator & Kunzman, 2014; Gilson et al., 2018). While it often seems that adolescents want nothing to do with the adults in their life, their adult relationships are of vital importance. “Adolescents need more-not fewer-adults in their lives and need to have positive relationships with them” (Christenbury et al., 2014, p. 5). It is critical when seeking to understand reading behaviors that teachers attempt to understand the social world of their students (Hall, 2009, Moje et al., 2008, Intrator & Kunzman, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2017; Gilson et al., 2018).

Moje (2002) highlighted the field of adolescent research and its trajectory over the last 50 years. She describes the shift from a focus on teaching and learning strategies to the study of the social practices of classrooms. Her assertion is that more recently, the focus of adolescent research has shifted to study how students use literacy both in and out of the classroom. She stated, “What we have not done, and where we need to direct our attention in the future, is to examine how youths’ literacy practices reflect the intersection

of multiple groups (ethnic, cultural, social) to examine how the knowledge, ways of knowing, and identities they build from those group experiences intersect with the advanced, deep content learning teachers, parents, and administrators expect young people to do in secondary school classrooms” (p. 213). It is important that we recognize that helping students become good readers is, impart, about helping them understand the role of identity and how the identities they place on themselves as well as the ones placed upon them contribute to their development as readers (Hall, 2009).

The “Struggling” Adolescent Reader

As stated before, a student labeled as a struggling reader is often one who has not performed at grade level on standardized measures or someone who has displayed difficulty with school-based reading tasks and are positioned to be struggling in relation to their peers. When we apply this term to adolescent readers the same holds true, yet we must also consider the unique factors that influence adolescent readers such as their search for identity, engagement and motivation, and the school structures impact them. Understanding the complexities of student reading achievement is not a new concept for the education community. “An initial look at assessment data and how it drives instruction reveals that while reading issues are specific and multifaceted...it is evident that “struggling readers” are often grouped under the same umbrella and provided with the same interventions” (Moreau, 2014, p.3). It is important to consider how institutional arrangements and contexts help construct deficit labels (McDermott et al., 2006).

The Research on Struggling Readers. The discussion of struggling adolescent readers is not a new one. According to The Center on Instruction’s Meta-Analysis of Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers (2016), “Reading instruction for older

students with reading difficulties is a topic increasingly in need of well-informed support and research-based guidance (Deshler, 2005; Dole, 1996).” As is indicated by the dates of the sources that The Center references, the reading community has been having this conversation for several decades. The meta-analysis produced by this organization in conjunction with researchers at The Center for Reading and Language Arts, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas Tech University, Florida Center for Reading Research, and Florida State University is similar in scope to much of the research and publications that exist regarding Response to Intervention and supporting struggling readers. The report summarizes aspects of recent research on reading instruction for adolescent struggling readers and synthesizes research findings to determine the relative effectiveness of interventions for struggling older readers and outlines the implications of these findings for practice. Much like this report, a great deal of research on this topic is intervention and instruction focused. The findings outlined in this report explain that adolescent readers who are not performing on grade level need support at both the word level and text level, need to be taught comprehension strategies, need exposure to a wide-range of texts, and benefit from support with word meanings and concepts. None of that information is new. Most educators who teach reading or English Language Arts at any level know that those recommendations are best practice. However, as the findings of this study explain, this is that it is only one piece of the puzzle.

A common narrative exists in both research and policy regarding struggling adolescent readers. There is a concern that a growing number of students do not read on grade level and students are not prepared for the reading requirements after high school (Faggella-Luby et al., 2009). Zebroff and Kaufman explained:

...there has also been much written about problems connected with low literacy levels in secondary schools in the United States...the Alliance for Excellent Education found that close to six million secondary students in the US have a reading proficiency well below grade level. It has been estimated that every day, around three thousand students drop out of school. (p. 2198)

Faggella-Luby et al. (2009) reviewed 11 policy reports intended to address a growing concern that adolescent learners are not adequately prepared to meet the literacy challenges of school and life. Their synthesis of these reports was intended to provide a variety of stakeholders including educators, administrators, and policy makers with important information necessary to address this concern. In their essay reviewing these reports, they determined that there must be a focus on literacy instruction and building capacity through structures and supports that, “strive to improve outcomes for all adolescent readers” and “require a comprehensive and school-wide effort” (Fagella-Luby et al., 2009, p. 469). They went on to explain that there is a need for “comprehensive and coordinated literacy programs at the state and district levels and supports school-wide implementation through enhanced standards, appropriate assessments, and ongoing professional development” (Fagella-Luby et al., 2009, p. 469). Beyond policy, research surrounding struggling readers has also sought to determine the cause and solution. “Researchers have theorized that struggling readers’ decisions are tied to low motivation, poor self-efficacy, or limited cognitive abilities” (Lenski, 2008, p. 287). This type of generalization about struggling readers implies that if students develop the appropriate skills and/or experience increased motivation and self-efficacy, then they will make more positive decisions about reading and improve their abilities.

This view does not consider any factors related to reader identity, experience, or prior knowledge. “Many people labeled “illiterate” may, from a more culturally sensitive viewpoint, be seen to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes and in specific contexts” (Street, 2005 p. 419). The adoption of this model of reading instruction only serves to marginalize a significant population of our students.

A System of Marginalization. Moje et al. (2000) wrote, “Marginalized readers are those who are not connected to literacy in classrooms and schools” (p. 405). Specifically, marginalized adolescents are those, “who are not engaged in the reading and writing done in school; who have language or cultural practices different from those valued in school; or who are outside of the dominant group because of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation” (p. 405). Students identified as struggling readers are often those who do not participate fully or are not able and willing to affiliate socially with the literacy practices that schools demand (Moje, 2002; Alvermann, 2014; Enriquez, 2014). Factors within a school context such as: teacher and student relationships, tracking of students into low-level courses, and standardized assessments can serve to marginalize students by positioning them as struggling or lagging in some way (Learned, 2016). By positioning these adolescent readers into marginalized positions in their schools and among their peers, we are creating a narrative about youth that only tells a portion of the story and creates a narrow set of options for certain students.

In her research with adolescent readers labeled as struggling, Hall (2009) found that Sarah was marginalized by several factors: “a cognitive, print-centric view of reading held by her teacher, identity assigned to her by her teacher, and her own goal to prevent her peers from identifying her as a poor reader” (p. 303). Sarah’s teacher, possibly

without intention, communicated to her what the identity of a good reader is, and Sarah, feeling unable to attain that identity, felt further marginalized in her classroom. Hall went on to explain that, “On the surface, it may appear that teachers’ and students’ actions are about cognitive difficulties and motivation, while a closer look is likely to suggest that they are about the identities that are prioritized and marginalized within classrooms” (p. 287). Students’ experiences with reading in school provide them with many opportunities to understand what it means to be identified as good or poor readers and to evaluate which identity they have held. These labels often rely upon performance data from reading tasks that are in accordance with standardized norms (Moje, 2002; Hall, 2009; Enriquez, 2014). Hall (2009) asserted that readers may be unhappy with their position as a struggling reader, but may also feel unable to change it. She wrote:

If identity takes precedence in how students approach reading tasks, their decisions may focus on what they need to do in order to hide, maintain, or promote a specific identity amongst their peers, teachers, or family members.

Therefore, the quality or amount of reading tasks and instruction they receive may have little influence on their actions unless it is responsive to issues of identity. (p. 287)

Educators must consider two important factors as they examine this view of reading that is imposed upon students who are considered struggling. Are the contexts and texts of our classrooms engaging enough to reach all students and how are the literacy skills required in everyday life different from those required in academic learning settings? (Moje et al., 2008). The dominant narrative of a struggling reader can only be disrupted when we seek to answer these questions.

When students' reading performances in classrooms and on assessments are used to identify those who are good readers that process also requires identifying those who are not, and when these forms of evaluation are repeated daily throughout a child's school career, students adopt reader identities that are most likely incomplete (Enriquez, 2014). The literacy story told by schools does not fully represent every reader's narrative. Moje et al., 2008 asserted:

Although NAEP data suggests that many young people are not proficient in the literacy skills necessary for proficient and advanced literacy achievement, a number of adolescent literacy researchers who have studied youth engaged in literacy outside of school have observed what appears to proficiency with sophisticated texts, even among youth identified as 'struggling' in school. (p.6)

This assertion paints a different picture of struggling adolescent readers that also deserves attention. Many "struggling" adolescent readers describe themselves as poor readers in terms of academic expectation but talk about their own reading in terms of agency and engagement (Frankel et al., 2019). These students do, at times, describe themselves as good readers outside of school (Moje; Hall, 2009). These scholars highlight the fact that adolescent readers, labeled as struggling in school, may not necessarily have the same sort of reading problems when reading out of school. It is this phenomenon that draws attention to the ways that schools are addressing the needs of all readers, how they are determining who is struggling and why, and whether these practices are effective.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach to supporting readers that uses both a prevention and remediation framework and is designed to provide universal screening,

ongoing progress monitoring, and research-based reading instruction” (Buffum et al., 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2011; O’Reilly et al., 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher 2012) “RTI serves the dual function of being a diagnostic process for identifying a learning disability, as well as a preventative tool that helps some students avoid falling so far behind that the classification is required at all” (O’Reilly et al., 2012). RTI has both cognitive and behaviorist orientations with its roots in Special Education. It was designed as a way to more universally identify students with learning disabilities. Preston, Wood & Stecker (2016) explained that, “Response to Intervention (RTI) emerged from the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but the roots of RTI are found embedded within the history of the field of learning disabilities (LD) as well as other sources of influence” (p. 1). At the time of the reauthorization, there was a push to move away from the practice of using discrepancy models to identify students with learning disabilities and to utilize a process that considered broader criteria (McEneaney, 2006; Brozo, 2010; Preston et al., 2016). While models of RTI and Reading Intervention programs vary, the general intention to identify students needing additional support with reading and provide specific strategies to support their needs with the intention of those students either being released from this support over time or being identified for Special Education if they are not able to make progress with that support. However, as Preston et al. (2016) cautioned, “despite the initial intent of RTI to solve problems, unintended consequences have emerged”. One of those unintended consequences is students spending many years being served in reading intervention programs-never to be released or to be qualified for Special Education.

Purpose of Reading Intervention. The intention of RTI is for students to only receive services on a temporary basis either to gain the skills and strategies that they need or to move forward with more targeted or specialized instruction. Those students who do not meet grade level expectations on school-based reading tasks are often labeled as struggling readers and provided support through reading intervention programs. Lenksi (2008) explained, “Students who have difficulty reading in schools are often labeled, ‘struggling readers’” (p. 41). The term struggling readers is an artifact of schooling and can be defined as students who have experienced difficulty with school reading (Franzak, 2006).” Therefore, most elementary schools and many middle schools provide students with support through the RTI process. The state of South Carolina’s Response to Intervention Framework (2011), defined RTI in the following way:

RTI provides a framework for effectively utilizing best instructional practices within a scientific, research-based instructional model. The goal is to deliver early intervention for every student who struggles to attain or maintain grade-level performance. Thus, RTI requires an ongoing, systematic process of using student performance and response data to guide instructional and intervention decisions. (p.2)

The RTI process calls for providing students support on three levels or tiers. Tier I support defined as differentiation for all students, school-wide in order to provide all students with the support they need to be successful. Tier I support consist of research-based reading practices delivered at the classroom level as the core or general reading curriculum. This approach is intended to employ differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students (Buffum et al., 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2011; O’Reilly et al., 2012;

Vaughn & Fletcher 2012). At the Tier I level, students all engage in universal screening to determine if there are additional supports needed beyond Tier I support. Students who demonstrate a need for more intensive intervention receive that intervention through either a push-in or pull-out model at the Tier II level (Buffum et al., 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2011). At this tier, data is also used to progress monitor students' growth and to make decisions about what type of support is needed. Students who may need additional support beyond what Tier II interventions are able to provide, will move to Tier III where they may be evaluated for special education to determine if there is greater need for support beyond reading intervention. Many students are identified for special education services through the RTI process. However, there are also many who do not qualify for special education because they are not identified as having a learning disability. However, they remain in reading intervention for many years because their reading achievement does not show progress towards grade-level expectations. Lenski (2008) explained that Mueller (2001), who studied struggling readers in her classroom, calls them 'lifers' as a way of portraying students who are identified as having problems with reading for most of their school career.

It is the "lifers" that cause concern for educators. These are the students that, despite many years of research-based reading instruction and support, are still not performing at grade level on school-based reading tasks. Far too many adolescent students are falling into this category. According to the 2017 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) report card, only 37% of 8th graders nationwide scored at or above proficient on the reading assessment. Data such as these raises many questions

about our efforts to support our readers as well as questions about who they are and how their identity impacts their reading performance.

As educators, we spend a great deal of time trying to understand why a child can or cannot do something. Many of those assumptions are based on what we have read and studied about how students learn or based on data we have collected that show us what they can do. We use these assumptions to plan instruction and make decisions. When it comes to reading instruction, the same is true. There has been a great deal of research conducted regarding reading programs and interventions for what the field has termed “struggling readers”. Although there has been an emphasis on investigating and understanding the phenomenon of struggling readers as well as how to address the underlying issues, there is not a clear and definitive conclusion or even agreement among those in the field about the best model for reading intervention for struggling readers (Lenski, 2008). O’Reilly et al., (2012) cautioned that the nature of RTI programs is such that students who struggle have failed to learn what was expected and had the opportunity to learn but did not. This structure often leads to intervening on students’ behalf once they have already failed rather than before there is a great need.

Reading Intervention for Adolescents. At the time of their 2011 study Johnson and Smith (2011) explained that little research on RTI at the middle school level existed. Similarly, while examining the universal screening process for RTI at nine middle schools O’Reilly et al. (2012), asserted that, “there is relatively little research on RTI that focuses on higher-level comprehension skills, mainstream students, and students in middle school” (p. 167). During my investigation of reading intervention, RTI, and reading support at the middle level, I found that this claim holds true today. The review

of some studies in this area of research has highlighted that the main area of focus in terms of reading support for adolescents is centered around what types of support are offered (i.e. programmatic details, curriculum, and teacher training). Some work has been done to understand teacher perspectives of adolescent reading difficulties and supports such as Moreau's (2014) phenomenological case study with 10 participants across 3 school districts to examine teachers' perspectives of middle school readers and Johnson's and Smith's (2011) study in a junior high school examining their RTI program and its growth over the course of six school years. Both of these studies outlined findings that described RTI programs in detail and explored how teachers navigated the implementation of them. Both Moreau (2014) and Smith (2011) found that teachers reported insufficient professional development in the area of reading instruction. They also found, as Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) did in their study with secondary students identified with reading difficulties, that evidence-based reading strategies were prevalent at the elementary level but not as commonly used at the secondary level.

According to The Center on Instruction's Meta-Analysis of Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers (2016), "Reading instruction for older students with reading difficulties is a topic increasingly in need of well-informed support and research-based guidance" (Deshler, 2005; Dole, Brown & Trathon, 1996). As is indicated by the dates of the sources that The Center references, the reading community has been having this conversation for several decades. The meta-analysis produced by this organization in conjunction with researcher from The Center for Reading and Language Arts, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas Tech University, Florida Center for Reading Research, and the Florida State University is similar in scope to much of the research and

publications that exist regarding Response to Intervention and supporting struggling readers. The report summarizes aspects of recent research on reading instruction for adolescent struggling readers and synthesizes research findings to determine the relative effectiveness of interventions for struggling older readers and outlines the implications of these findings for practice. Much like this report, a great deal of research on this topic is intervention and instruction focused. The findings outlined in this report explain that adolescent readers who are not performing on grade level need support at both the word level and text level, need to be taught comprehension strategies, need exposure to a wide-range of texts, and benefit from support with word meanings and concepts. Similarly, Ciullo et al. (2016) conducted a study with middle level educators in two states who provided RTI support at the Tier II and Tier III level. They sought to uncover the type and frequency of evidence-based strategies used and determine the effectiveness of them. They, too, found that adolescent readers need instruction at both the word and text level. Their findings described a lack of focus on informational texts and other skills such as writing that are necessary for high school readiness.

Frankel (2017) wrote about a high school student, Samantha, who's reader identity was impacted by her participation in a strategy used to support her as a "struggling reader" in her reading intervention class. Samantha's participation in this literacy practice required her to read short passages and complete worksheets that reinforced reading strategies she had been taught. These practices were disconnected from the act of reading itself and had little relevance to her identity as a reader. Frankel (2017) concluded that, "literacy practices position individuals differently depending on

the identities and experiences they bring with them and the broader context in which those practices occur” (p. 516).

There is a great need for the reading community to learn from the students themselves and to try to understand how our interventions, supports, and well-intentioned tracking has affected them. We need to find out from the students if the supports are useful and if the supports are necessary, and we need to understand all of this at the individual level. We are continuing to apply mass support to all students who look the same on paper, but who are very different individuals. This is what gives me pause to wonder about what these students really need. Do they really have reading difficulties or are our measures incomplete? Are there reasons that have nothing to do with reading that have caused this phenomenon?

Brozo (2010) wrote, “Looking at secondary reading only through a disability lens...reinforces stereotypes about the nature of reading for students in middle and high school” (p.78). He also explained that the International Reading Association’s Commission on RTI (2009) cautioned secondary-level schools against using an RTI model that is based upon primary and elementary approaches. Because of the nature of reading at a secondary level, the RTI process may not fully address the breadth and depth of what adolescent readers need. RTI tends to focus solely on reading skills and strategies while, “we know that secondary students who struggle to make meaning from the complex prose they’re confronted with daily aren’t necessarily remedial readers” (Brozo, 2010, p.78). The complexities of language diversity, culture, and literacy skills that adolescents bring to their classrooms is far more nuanced than reading intervention accounts for. This is why I believe that it is crucial to examine reading from the reader’s

perspective and to understand how the tenets of social constructivism are at play for our “struggling” adolescent readers. Viewing reading through the lens of students’ experiences will shed light on why we continue to see some students served in reading intervention year after year and why some students who receive intensive support do not show the gains that the support is intended to yield.

Limitations of RTI in the Middle Grades. There is not currently a clear picture in the research community about the best way to address what we have deemed an epidemic of “struggling” adolescent readers. There are many iterations of RTI models that have been successfully implemented at the elementary level, but few have been implemented at the secondary level (Vaughn and Fletcher 2012). Reading specialists have profound differences on what they believe constitutes the best research and practice leading to a divide (Christenbury et al., 2014). L. Fuchs et al., (2010) wrote, “Few researchers have focused on an older, school-age population when studying RTI.” (p. 22), and Faggella-Luby et al. (2009) reported in their findings that there is a great deal of research to support adoption of RTI models at the elementary level, especially in the area of literacy. However, many challenges remain for application in secondary settings asking the question, “How will RTI and multiple tiers of instruction be operationalized in secondary settings?” (p. 471). Their stance, taken from the review of several reports about reading achievement, is that schools must adopt appropriate screening measures that allow for accurate student placement prior to the start of the academic year while ensuring that core reading instruction is delivered to all students. They explained that students who do not respond adequately to instruction should receive additional time for intense support. They also explained the need for Tiers of support and progress

monitoring to allow for flexible movement between tiers as well as fidelity of implementation of this model that centers around evidence-based practices.

A concern prevalent in the research surrounding middle level reading intervention is the lack of Tier I support. Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) asserted that Tier I instruction at the secondary level is “conceptually similar but practically more complicated”. The challenge in implementing research-based practices in the area of reading comes into play in the various content areas outside of ELA. Tier I interventions at the classroom level are a benefit to older students, but must focus on vocabulary and background knowledge across the content areas. Vaughn’s and Fletcher’s (2012) multi-year study of secondary students with reading difficulties described the importance of reading instruction at the word and text level in classrooms beyond English Language Arts. Teachers at the secondary level often report not being equipped with the necessary training and skills or time in their curriculum to support students’ reading in this way (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Moreau, 2014). Other factors that contribute to the limitations of RTI at the middle school level are scheduling conflicts, availability of and access to adequate screening and progress monitoring tools, and an emphasis on testing (Ciullo et al., 2016). One of the reasons for these issues may exist in the effort to implement RTI in the middle grades that mirrors implementation in elementary schools.

In contrast to this model of reading intervention for adolescent learners that very closely resembles an elementary RTI model, L. Fuchs et al. (2010) described a model for adolescent intervention that deviates from what is commonly done in the elementary years. They cite a research study done by Vaughn (2010) in which a middle school reading intervention program was evaluated. The study provided professional

development to teachers with a goal of integrating reading comprehension and vocabulary into Tier I strategies and decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension into the Tier II strategies. The findings are described as “disappointing” (p.22). As L. Fuchs et al. (2010) explained, after 36 weeks there were statistically no significant effects on fluency or comprehension, and they did not see improvement on students’ chances of passing the high-stakes state assessment. They wrote, “...we consider why differences between elementary versus middle and high school settings may require an alternative conceptualization of RTI at higher grades” (p. 23). Their assertion is that elementary frameworks for intervention reflect assumptions that may not apply to secondary schools and adolescent readers. One of these assumptions being that “effective reading intervention is the same across the grades” (p. 25). “Even when concentrating specifically on reading comprehension, the traditional focus on strategy use may be inappropriate for adolescents with substantial knowledge and vocabulary deficits” (L. Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 26).

This claim brings us to yet a third perspective of adolescent reading support. Brozo (2010) wrote, “As we know, to be a successful reader for academic purposes in middle and high school, adolescents need much more than skill in decoding words or the ability to read smoothly and quickly. They must also be knowledgeable of and have control over a range of sophisticated literacy strategies” (p. 279). He went on to point out the limiting nature of focusing solely on “scientific” evidence as the framework for identifying students’ intervention needs. He explained that his approach and the use of tools to monitor reading progress and determine reading practices limit the scope of reading intervention at the secondary level. He concluded, “This is because these

monitoring methods tend to emphasize simple, surface-level indicators of reading skill-a vestige of RTI at the primary/elementary grades- such as oral reading fluency indicated by the number of words correct per minute” (p.280). He posited that it is important to ask what is missing in RTI when it serves as the framework for adolescent reading support. Bozo's main take-away was that, “because of its cognitive and behavioral orientation, RTI-inspired programs are unlikely to accommodate recent theorizing and scholarship around self-efficacy, youth culture, and new literacies” (p. 280). Lastly, he explained that RTI approaches may, “perpetuate the myth that only scientifically- based instructional strategies will increase reading achievement for students” (p. 281). His stance was that this approach may limit instructional options for secondary teachers working with adolescents who bring diversity of language, culture, and literacy competencies to their classrooms.

It is clear from this review of just three viewpoints regarding reading intervention for adolescent students that this is an area of instruction still being examined and defined. Hall (2009) claimed that, “It is impossible for a single framework to accurately portray the experience and difficulties faced by struggling readers” (p. 304). Regardless of the model used to deliver support, there are important considerations of identity and experience that must be valued. Street (2005) explained that literacy is more complex than school curricula and assessment allows for. His belief is that curricula and assessment reduce literacy to a few simple and mechanical skills that do not take the whole of a reader’s experience into account. Street also emphasized the importance of ensuring that our intervention practices do not treat “home background” as a deficit. Adopting what Street (2005) coined an ideological approach to reading support can help

to achieve this as well as accomplish what Moje et al. (2008) sought when they asked, “How do we build educational interventions that acknowledge youths’ strengths and interests, while also engaging them in content-based reading and writing?” (p. 30).

The work of these scholars and the questions they posited, leave me wondering how to best support our learners so that they do not become positioned as struggling readers? How do we create school contexts and structures that build on students’ strengths and consider those strengths and their sociocultural experiences in our curriculum? We must consider the role that reading intervention programs have played in positioning students as struggling readers, and examine our practices and structures that are the supports for those programs. A crucial aspect in beginning to understand those components is seeking to understand the students and how they see themselves as readers.

Conclusion

“As schools teach students to read, they also teach that in order to be identified as ‘good readers’, students must engage and interact with texts as schools decide” (Enriquez, 2014, p. 105). This is an ongoing concern when we consider the number of students who are determined to be struggling or not meeting expectations. We place these students into reading intervention programs with the intention of supporting their skill deficit and catching them back up to their peers. In doing so, we position them as struggling and often place them on a track that lasts the entirety of their school careers. Scholars (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Moreau, 2014; Frankel, 2017; Golden & Pandya, 2018; and Learned, 2019), who have studied this phenomenon, caution educators about the role that we have played in perpetuating this position of struggling reader. If we are

going to truly support all readers, we need to consider several things: the relationship between the literacies taught at school and the literacies practiced in other contexts; the relationships between students and teachers; and the structure of support systems that exist in schools.

There is currently a gap in the research surrounding adolescent readers and their description of their experiences with reading intervention. Understanding the role that identity plays in reading development and achievement is crucial (Moje, 2002; Moje et al. 2008; Hall, 2009; Alvermann, 2014; Enriquez, 2014). Little research currently exists to explain how adolescent readers, labeled as struggling, view themselves as readers. Students' view of their own identity as readers is an important aspect in understanding how effective reading support is or isn't for them.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This dissertation employed qualitative case study research as defined by Merriam (1998), “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon” (p. xiii). The fundamental goal of case study research is to conduct an in-depth analysis of an issue, within its context in order to understand the issue from the perspective of the researcher (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017). This study utilized three individual cases with each participant serving as a bounded case. Analysis was conducted for each individual and conclusions were drawn for each one as well as across all three.

The aims of my study were to gain insight and understanding of adolescent readers who are being served in reading intervention during their middle school years and who have previously received reading support in elementary school. This study seeks to understand the students’ perspectives of the support they have received in reading intervention and their views on reading itself. The goal of this research is to uncover the identities that these students use to describe their experiences with reading. Harrison et al., (2017) described case study research, “as a way to investigate and understand complex issues in real world settings” (p.1). Context and identity will be crucial components of the phenomenon that I am seeking to better understand.

A case study was used to guide my inquiry into this topic as well as provide the methods necessary to examine it deeply. This approach to data collection and analysis served to guide both my methodological thinking as well as to provide a blueprint for the methods used for the study design, data collection, and data analysis. Harrison et al (2017) explained that across the literature, case study research is referred to as both, “a method and a methodology, an approach, research and research design, research strategy, and/or a form of inquiry” (p.7). While case study as a methodology is often linked to the epistemological aims of the researcher, writings about case study as a method focus on data collection and analysis are often focused on procedures and structures.

The epistemological aims of case study methodology range from the post positivist perspective of Yin (2002, 2017) to the constructivist views of Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995). Both Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) believed that knowledge and reality are constructed through our experiences, and research is an important source for producing knowledge about the world (Boblin et al., 2013; Yazan, 2015; Harrison et al., 2017).

Epistemologically, Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) are linked. They are both proponents of inquiry where the researcher assumes that reality is constructed and discovering meaning and understanding of experiences occurs in context. Merriam (1998) stated, “Research is after all, producing knowledge about the world. In our case, the world of educational practice” (p.3). Stake (1995) wrote, “Most contemporary qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (p.99). They are also both clear that the knowledge production is co-constructed between the researcher and his or her participants. The aims of this research study, my positionality as

a researcher, and the goals of this study are closely aligned with the constructivist paradigm that Stake and Merriam espouse. I believe that my role and knowledge as an educator as well as my rapport with my participants are an important factor in constructing the detailed explanation of participants' perspectives of their reader identities.

The following chapter details the methods and process of this case study approach discussing design and the conceptual framework, research methodology, data collection and analysis, context of the study and its participants (including researcher positionality), and limitations of the study.

Research Design and Methods

The research design and methods used in this dissertation research follow the tenets of case study design as they are described by Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995). Because case studies are used to gain understanding of a phenomenon by exploring it through data collection and analysis of multiple data sources, this approach was employed to deeply understand how these adolescent readers view the reading process and their role in it through prolonged engagement with the participants and close examination of multiple sources of data. This approach to data collection allowed me to conduct an in-depth and detailed examination of each of the participants within each individual case (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) as well as across cases. Each case describes the unique perspective of an eighth-grade student who was chosen as a participant. The goal of this case is to understand and describe the experiences of each participant and their thoughts and feelings about themselves as readers and their participation in various reading interventions. Most importantly, this research explores the theoretical and

pedagogical directions of the participants' words, ideas, and experiences to gain deeper understanding through natural interaction. “Being open to any possibility can lead to serendipitous discoveries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 121). Further, as Stake (1995) pointed out, qualitative researchers, “...are trying to remain open to the nuances of increasing complexity” (p. 21).

While Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) have similar epistemological views of case study methodology, when it comes to case study as a method, their views are slightly different. It could be argued that Merriam (1998) falls almost in the center between the deductive methods and procedures prescribed by Yin (2002) and the inductive and exploratory stance that Stake (1995) takes in his approach. Stake’s (1995) approach to using case study methods is incredibly flexible and recursive. He believes in placing emphasis on inductive exploration, discovery, and holistic analysis. He does not suggest starting the research process with a detailed plan for data collection or a predetermined theoretical stance but rather allowing the process to unfold during data collection (Boblin et al., 2013; Harrison et al., 2017; Yazan, 2015). In contrast, Yazan (2016) explains that Merriam (1998) outlined clear guidelines for using relevant literature and a theoretical framework to guide the research and also processes that are necessary in designing qualitative research (p.141).

When designing this study and considering my epistemological aims, I found myself drawn to Stake’s (1995) highly flexible and less structured approach to exploring a phenomenon. I believe strongly in the notion that the perspectives of the participants should guide my use of theory and its role in data collection. However, I was also aware that my lack of experience as a researcher may present challenges when using a less

structured approach. Miles and Huerman (1994) cautioned those who are new to qualitative research. They explained that, “Highly inductive, loosely designed studies make good sense when experimental researchers have plenty of time to explore exotic cultures or understand complex social phenomena” (p.89). They are also clear in their writing that novice researchers should follow a more structured approach to designing and conducting research. In addition, Maxwell (2013) explained that structured approaches can help ensure the comparability of data across situations and participants while less structured approaches allow the researcher to focus on the particular phenomenon being studied. Less structured approaches “trade generalizability and compatibility” for “contextual understanding” (p.91). There is little existing research that describes adolescent reader identities from their own perspectives. Especially when we consider the perspectives of students who have or are receiving reading interventions or support. Therefore, my intention was not to generalize the findings but rather to understand the participants' experiences. Knowing that it would be crucial to utilize a more structured approach, detailed planning and a clear process for data collection and study design as Merriam (1998) suggested became important aspects of my data collection process. Maxwell (2013) shared that it is possible to create a tentative structured plan for research while also leaving open the possibility for revisions as needed.

In planning for this case study design, a crucial component to establishing the research design was the parameters that bound it. Case studies are often bounded by several contexts (Yazan, 2016; Harrison et al, 2017). Harrison et al (2017) detailed the specific ways that cases are bounded. Factors such as participants, location, process,

timeline, and data sources must be outlined and explained. The specific ways that this case is bounded are outlined in the remaining sections of this chapter. Merriam (2009) explained that the use of case study methodology stems from the researcher's motivation to explore or seek to understand experiences from the perspectives of those involved. Using that understanding of the purpose of case study research, this dissertation research describes the self-reported reading identities of adolescent students who are currently and were previously served in reading intervention.

Research Context

This study employed purposeful sampling strategies (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97) to choose both the research location and study participants. In keeping with Maxwell's (2013) description of purposeful sampling, this research utilized a particular setting, participants, and activities that were deliberately chosen to provide information relevant to the study's questions and goals. The location provided information-rich examples of the phenomenon that I sought to understand as well as a location that represented the phenomenon as it typically exists.

In order to fully understand the impact of reading intervention from a reader's perspective, I chose a site where students have participated in an established reading intervention program in both elementary and middle school. In order for the findings to help educators think differently about how we serve adolescent readers in our intervention programming, the site also needed to provide access to diverse participants who represent students across our state in terms of gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Lastly, I sought a school that housed either seventh or eighth grades in order to

have access to participants who had already received at least one year of reading support in middle school.

There are three middle schools in this district that house grades seven and eight. One of the three of those schools does not have a diverse population that is reflective of our state. The other two schools are more similar to one another in demographics as well as more similar to the demographics of the surrounding area. I have worked in both of these schools, and I am very knowledgeable of the programmatic aspects of reading intervention at both. While either of the schools would meet several of the criteria that I have for my ideal site, only one of the schools houses grades 6-8, and that school is Global Middle School (pseudonym).

I previously worked at this school site for three years and was serving at Global Middle School as the Assistant Principal for Instruction when I initially planned this dissertation research and submitted my proposal to conduct the study. However, during the summer of 2020, I changed positions and am now the principal of a neighboring school in the same district. Initially, I was concerned about how this development would impact my research plans and access to the participants. Additionally, the advent of COVID-19 and uncertainty of how schools would open and operate for the 2020-2021 school year, gave me pause when considering the implementation of the research that I had proposed. While these developments did present some unforeseen challenges for my research, I was able to work around them and to design a plan that very closely aligned with my original plan and allowed me to collect the necessary data. These revisions and details are outlined in the data collection section. Global Middle School not only met the criteria that I needed in a research site, my prior knowledge of the school and

understanding of the inner workings of the phenomenon in this context, were extremely helpful in gaining access to participants and in working with the necessary staff at the school.

The school district in which Global Middle school is located has an established RTI program in all of our elementary schools that has been in existence for more than 10 years. There is also an established reading intervention program in the middle school that is currently in its eighth year. Both of these programs have guiding criteria for student identification and operating guidelines, and each elementary and middle school has a plan for how they serve students within the larger district guidelines. Because both programs are established and have been in existence for more than six years.

Global Middle School is a Title I middle school located in a suburban community in the Southeast. The school is typically home to a diverse population with an enrollment of approximately 1025 students in grades 6-8. Forty-nine percent of the student population is African-American, 33% Caucasian, 6% Latino, 6% two or more races, and 5% reported as other races. The school also has a large Special Education program with 20% of the students being served on an Individual Education Plan or Section 504 plan. Students who are identified as having an academic need in the area of reading and who are not provided reading services through Special Education, are eligible to be served in the school's reading intervention program. These students are identified using previous standardized test scores, grades from reading or English language arts class, and previous participation in reading intervention. Students who are identified as needing reading support are placed in a Literacy Lab class which fits into student's schedules as one of their elective classes. Literacy Lab classes cap enrollment at 10 students and generally

range from 8-10 students per section. In a typical year, the Global Middle School schedule allows for two sections of seventh grade Literacy Lab, two sections of eighth grade Literacy Lab, and 1 section of sixth grade Literacy Lab. Global Middle School meets the criteria that I sought for choosing a location.

In addition to meeting the programmatic needs for site selection, as a whole this district has a diverse population of students that is reflective of our state, and the schools consistently outperform the state average on standardized reading measures every year. I ultimately chose to conduct this study in a middle school in the district where I work because it was my involvement with and knowledge of our middle level reading intervention program that first peaked my interest in studying this phenomenon. In my previous role as Assistant Principal for Instruction, which I held for seven years at two different middle schools in my district, I was closely involved in the placement of students into reading intervention as well as the programmatic direction of the reading support provided. These experiences led me to have questions about the students we were serving and wonderings about their role in the process and their perspectives of this support.

Participant Selection

While the availability of participants was affected by the changes to this school year, my selection of students was no less purposeful than it would have been if school had operated under normal circumstances this year. Glesne (2016) wrote that, “Qualitative researchers tend to select each of their cases purposefully” (p. 50). My selection for participants in this research was very purposeful in nature. In order to choose the participants, I looked for students who had received reading support in a pull

out or push-in intervention program for at least three years and who were able and willing to talk about their experiences, beliefs, and feelings about reading and the reading support they have received. My selection of these students was both based on certain conditions as well as theory-based. In seeking to understand how factors of identity impact students' understanding and beliefs about reading and reading achievement, it was crucial to choose the students who were most able to talk about their own reading identity.

The participants chosen for this study are eighth grade students being served in the school's reading intervention class which is called Literacy Lab. Students are identified for this class based on their previous reading test scores. Historically, students placed in this class score in the bottom quartile on the previous school year's end of year standardized assessment and the Spring administration of the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment.

Due to the COVID-19 virus, the structure of our school's learning platforms was adjusted for the 2020-2021 school year. It was determined by August of 2020 that students would have the option to attend school virtually or in person. Approximately, fifty percent of the students who are assigned to Global Middle School as their home school chose to attend the districts newly created virtual academy, leaving approximately 500 students learning in person. The virtual students were still connected to Global Middle School as their home school, but only attended classes virtually. Additionally, not all of these students were necessarily taught by Global Middle School teachers, and they did not have access to the same exact programming as the students attending school in person. One of the classes not available to these virtual students was reading intervention. This did impact participant selection for this study as several of the students

originally identified for placement into Literacy Lab chose to learn virtually which greatly decreased the enrollment in the program. Additionally, changes to the schedule left the Literacy Lab teacher only teaching a few sections of the class rather than her typical load of 5 sections. In working with her to determine the best course of action for my participant selection and data collection, we determined that her one section of eighth grade students would be the best group for me to work with. There were five students in that section all of whom had received reading support in the 6th and 7th grades as well as during their elementary school years. In addition to that criteria being met, I had previously worked closely with three of the five students and already had established a positive relationship with them. All five students enrolled in this section of Literacy Lab participated in the research project. With the help of Mrs. Halo, I sought and received informed consent (Appendix A) from all five students in the class.

Of the five students in the class, four of them were willing and able to articulate how they see themselves as readers and what impact their participation in reading intervention has had on that identity. Of those four students, three of them had participated in reading intervention in my current school district since elementary school. The fourth student had received support in a neighboring district. I chose to use the data collected from the three students who had received continued reading support in the same district. The participants also represented both genders and different races and socioeconomic backgrounds. The use of three different participants was pertinent in gaining a variety of perspectives while still allowing me to deeply understand each one's perspective. Demographic details for each participant are outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 *Participant Demographics*

Name (all pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Race	Years in Book Club	Years in Literacy Lab
Michelle	Female	14	African-American	4	3
Davante	Male	14	African-American	6	3
Josh	Male	13	White	4	3

Michelle is an 8th grade student who attended Global Middle School. for 7th and 8th grades and was placed in the reading intervention program for both school years. She is a 14-year-old African- American female who has been educated in this same school district for her entire school career. Michelle attended the same elementary school for grades K-5 and began receiving reading support as a second grader. She received Tier I support at the classroom level in the second grade and moved to Tier II support as a third grader. At the Tier II level, Michelle was pulled out of her general education classroom to receive additional interventions from a reading specialist. She remained in Tier II intervention through the fifth grade. She exited RTI at the end of her fifth-grade year and was recommended for Literacy Lab in the sixth grade. Before attending Global Middle school, she attended an intermediate school for 6th grade. She then moved on to attend 7th and 8th grades at Global where Mrs. Halo has been her Literacy Lab teacher for the past two years.

Davante is an 8th grade student who has attended Global Middle School for grades 6, 7 and 8. He has been in the same school district his entire school career. Davante is a 14-year old African-American male who has been a part of reading intervention programs since the 1st grade. He attended the same elementary school for grades K-5 before attending Global Middle School. Davante spent one month (May 5,

2019-June 14, 2019) of his 6th grade year at an Alternative Learning Center in his school district because of a behavior issue that arose that year. Mrs. Halo has been his Literacy Lab teacher for the past three years. In elementary school, Davante began receiving Tier II reading intervention as a Kindergartener. He remained in Tier II intervention through the 5th grade when he was exited from RTI and promoted to the sixth grade where he was placed in Literacy Lab. As a Tier II intervention student, Davante was pulled out of his general education classroom to work with a reading interventionist and receive additional interventions beyond what his classroom teacher may have provided.

Josh is an 8th grade student who has attended Global Middle School for grades 7 and 8. He has been in the same school district his entire school career. Josh attended the same elementary school for grades K-5 Before and attended an intermediate school for 6th grade before moving to Global Middle School for grades 7 and 8. He is a 13-year old White male who has been a part of reading intervention programs since the 2nd grade. He entered RTI to receive Tier I support at the classroom level in the 2nd grade and continued to receive Tier I support until the fourth grade when his support changed to Tier II. At the Tier II level, Josh was pulled out of his general education classroom for additional intervention until he exited RTI at the end of 5th grade and was recommended for Literacy Lab for sixth grade. He was placed in the Literacy Lab class in 6th grade as well as both 7th and 8th grades. Mrs. Halo has been his Literacy Lab teacher for the past two years.

In the district in which these students attend school, students at the elementary level can be identified to receive support in reading through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process and receive services as Tier I, Tier II, or Tier IIIA support. The structure of

that tiered support can vary by school. The information in this chapter regarding the support services that each of the participants received in elementary school is based upon students' recollection of their support and the individual RTI support plans that I was able to review.

In this school district, middle school students also receive reading support in a program that is called Middle Level Intervention (MLI). MLI is a continuation of the support received in elementary school and mirrors some aspects of RTI, but does not follow a tiered system and does not use regular progress monitoring to move students between levels of support. Students are identified based on test scores and placed into a course named, Literacy Lab. The course is designed to be year-long, but can be offered as a semester only, and replaces one of the student's elective courses. All of the participants of this study received RTI services in elementary school, and all of them were placed in Literacy Lab for grades 6-8.

Introducing Mrs. Halo

The Literacy Lab class at Global Middle School is taught by Maybelle Halo (pseudonym). Mrs. Halo is a veteran teacher who is certified to teach all core content subjects at the middle school level as well as elementary school. She holds a Master Degree in Language and Literacy, and has a great deal of experience supporting readers of various ages. Prior to her tenure at Global Middle School, she taught 5th grade for several years, but began her career as a middle school teacher. The 2020-21 school year is Mrs. Halo's fourth year at Global Middle School and her fourth year teaching Literacy Lab.

Mrs. Halo is known to her students as their safe space. She is often the teacher whom they feel the most comfortable and connected. She is gifted at building relationships and meeting her students where they are. Throughout our time together, the students all spoke about Mrs. Halo's class as the class that helps them to get through the rest of their day. One of the advantages of her role as the only Literacy Lab teacher is that Mrs. Halo has worked with these students for multiple years. Because Davante attended Global Middle School in 6th grade as well as 7th and 8th, he has been in Mrs. Halo's class for three years. Michelle and Josh have been in Literacy Lab with Mrs. Halo for two years. At the time of our data collection, all of the students had spent, at minimum, over a year working with Mrs. Halo. This time spent together as well as her incredible ability to build relationships with students are crucial factors in students' descriptions of themselves as readers. This is one of the ideas that will be explored in detail in this chapter.

The data that were collected were done so during the course of these students' Literacy Lab class by myself and the students' teacher, Maybelle Halo. Both the structure and support of the Literacy Lab class and Maybelle's role in the lives of these participants were crucial aspects of the data collection and analysis and therefore have important implications for the finding of this study.

Data Collection

An important part of case study research is the collection of data from multiple sources and the triangulation of that data during analysis (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Maxwell, 2013; Yazan, 2015; Glense, 2016; Harrison et al, 2017). Acquiring information from different sources helps to gain information about different aspects of the phenomenon. The most typical forms of data collection in qualitative case study research

include: observations, interviews, and document analysis (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015; Glense, 2016). Additionally, Glense (2016) explained:

Although using multiple data-collection methods is the most common form of triangulation, triangulation also refers to the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources (e.g., not just teachers, but students and parents as well), multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives (p. 45).

As Glense pointed out, a comprehensive case involves not only multiple sources but multiple approaches to the case and to understanding the phenomenon. Keeping this in mind, I originally set out to collect data using: one or two focus group discussions, observations in the reading intervention class, individual interviews, and the examination of documents. The data collection process was yet another area of the study design that was impacted by the changes that COVID-19 had on the school system.

Impact of COVID-19 on Data Collection. Many aspects of the school year and school environment were affected by COVID-19. Factors such as student enrollment, instructional models, school calendar, and staffing were all adjusted for the 2020-2021 school year. Of these factors, the one that had the biggest impact on the data collection process for this study was the shifting of instructional models. In the district where this research took place, the school year began in a hybrid model of instruction. This meant that the students attending school in person were split into two cohorts. One cohort attended school on Mondays and Tuesdays and the other cohort attended school on Thursdays and Fridays. Both cohorts attended school together on Wednesdays in a virtual platform so that there were no students learning in person on Wednesdays. On the other days that students were not attending school in person, they stayed home and engaged in

asynchronous learning. For the Literacy Lab students, this meant that their very small class of five students was divided into two even smaller groups for in person learning. This structure of hybrid learning remained in place from September 8, 2020 until November 9, 2020. On November 9, 2020 all secondary students returned to 4 day in person instruction with Wednesdays continuing as distance learning. However, this changed again on December 7, 2020 when students returned to hybrid learning and remained in that learning model until January 4, 2021. In addition to these changes, all schools in the school district were required to limit the number of people entering the building. Anyone not employed at the school needed to have special permission to be on campus with students.

Obviously, all of these new factors had an impact on the original plans that I had for data collection. I had to rethink the plans that I had made and determine if data collection would even be possible during the Fall semester. Initially, I worried that I may have to postpone data collection; but upon further thought and discussion, it seemed apparent that we did not know when things would return to “normal” so I was better off adjusting my plans to meet the new circumstances. In terms of conducting the observations that I had intended to do, I had to take into consideration how the hybrid model affected the enrollment and therefore structure of the Literacy Lab class as well as the fact that I did not know when I would be able to go into the school. I also had to consider the fact that students were only receiving in person instruction twice a week which certainly impacted the types of learning they were engaged in. In order to think through this and revise my plan, I met with the students’ Literacy Lab teacher in late-August to discuss our options for data collection.

Mrs. Halo, the Literacy Lab teacher, at Global Middle School is currently in her 4th year teaching Literacy Lab. She is extremely passionate and knowledgeable about reading and her students, and she is what Maxwell (2013) referred to as a “Gatekeeper”. Mrs. Halo knows her students extremely well and was able to provide insight about her students that I may not have otherwise been privy to. She was also an important key to helping me establish relationships with the students throughout the data collection process. After meeting with her to discuss data collection in the COVID-19 classroom, we determined that the use of virtual observations, group discussions, student documents, and interviews would be feasible. Below I describe both a typical pre-COVID-19 Literacy Lab classroom as well as the virtual Literacy Lab class that was held during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Description of the Literacy Lab Class. In a typical year, the classroom is buzzing with conversation and movement even though the bell just rang. Some students are busy chatting with each other or one of the two adults in the room while others are heating up food in a microwave that sits in a corner. One child is writing words on the vocabulary board that he discovered while reading in another class earlier in the day and another is thumbing through books that are neatly lining the wall of bookshelves along one side of the room (observation field notes, October 9, 2019). The class is typically a small one- only ten students maximum, but with so much going on, it often seems like several more. Suddenly, the teacher calls the students to the center of the room, and as they finish regulating themselves through food, drink, or conversation, they slowly gather on the floor to lay on bean bag pillows or sit around the room in wobble stools and various types of chairs. They are comfortably perched to listen to the daily read aloud.

The teacher begins with a greeting and “temperature check” to see where students are mentally and emotionally before introducing the picture book that she will read to them (observation field notes, October 9, 2019). As she reads the book, she stops periodically to ask the students questions about the plot, about predictions they are making, and about their inferences. The students answer openly; it’s clear that they do not have to raise their hands because there is a conversational culture in this room that allows for this free exchange of ideas (observation field notes, November 20, 2019). It is clear that this classroom is unique. This Literacy Lab classroom is a place where I observed frequently during the Fall of 2019, and it’s where I became well-acquainted with 10 seventh grade students who spent 5th period every day as active and engaged readers. Three of these students (Michelle, Davante, and Josh) became the participants of this study as 8th graders during the 2020-2021 school year. However, their Literacy Lab class looked much different during that school year.

Description of the Virtual Literacy Lab Class. During a school year that was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students learned how to reimagine instruction in a virtual world. In this environment, the Literacy Lab class continued to function as a safe haven for students. The classroom described above was the place where the participants of this study were supported as 7th grade readers. It’s a place that I observed often both as a researcher and as an administrator in the school. As 8th graders, these students received support in a combination of virtual synchronous instruction, face-to-face instruction that mirrored the previous year, and asynchronous learning. I was privileged to participate in the virtual synchronous instruction with these students.

The virtual classroom offered some experiences that were similar to face-to-face instruction and familiar for these learners, and it also created experiences that were unique to this model. It is much easier to hide in a virtual classroom. I joined the students in their Google Meet for several virtual Wednesday meetings. The routine to start class was often the same. One by one, students logged onto the virtual platform and joined the class. Class often began with only one student and the adults in the Meet having their cameras on. It took a good bit of prodding from the teacher for all 5 students to turn on their cameras or make a comment in the chat box to indicate that they were present. Even after much encouragement, Davante's camera almost always remained off. He would eventually speak to say hello, but it was rare that we saw him even when he spoke (observation field notes, October 21, 2020, October 28, 2020, November 4, 2020).

Among the students who could be seen, it was common to have one or more laying in his or her bed; another tossing a football in the air; and others coming in and out of the Meet participating inconsistently (observation field notes, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020; October 28, 2020). On occasion, we could hear students' music or televisions playing in the background, and on more than one occasion, it appeared that a student was playing video games during the class period (observation field notes, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020; October 28, 2020). Mrs. Halo called the students out on this and was almost always successful in getting them back on task, but it was clear that this form of teaching and learning was a struggle for both teachers and students.

These virtual Wednesday meetings were a part of the hybrid model of instruction that these students were engaged in for the first 3 months (September-November) of the 2020-21 school year. In this format, this group of 5 students were only together as an

entire group during their Wednesday virtual day with half of them attending in person on Monday and Tuesday and the other half meeting in person on Thursdays and Friday. They would all eventually return to school together 4 days a week later in November and then 5 days a week in February, but our time together ended before those changes.

While the format of class changed, and there were new challenges to navigate, one aspect of the Literacy Lab class that did not change was the safe haven that has been created through personalized attention and strong teacher-student relationships. Mrs. Halo began each class with an individual greeting of each student; she asked about their morning classes and assignments while checking in to see how she might be able to help. She joked with them and asked them personal questions that followed up on previous conversations they had or centered around comments about something in environments that she observed (focus group, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020; October 28, 2020; interview, November 4, 2020). Students appeared to have an honest and open rapport with Mrs. Halo. They told her the truth about what they think about school and their teachers as well as what was happening in their other classes. It was clear that these students are connected to Mrs. Halo and see her as a person whom they can trust. On more than one occasion, Davante expressed that this class and Mrs. Halo are his safe spaces. During our October 21, 2020 Google Meet, he responded to Mrs. Halo's question about why the students are not always attending their other virtual classes consistently by saying, "Yeah that because you're my favorite teacher. If I could, I'd stay with you all day." Similarly, during the same Meet, Josh commented that, "I miss Mrs. Halo when we aren't with her any day because she's cool."

It became clear to me through working with these students that the strong relationships that Mrs. Halo built with her students are a foundational aspect of their identities as readers and as students. While this virtual classroom environment is unusual, it still proved to be a place where students were encouraged, challenged, and supported as readers and as people.

Observations. I originally intended to begin the data collection process by observing frequently in the reading intervention class that my participants are enrolled in since this class serves as the context for this study. The purpose of classroom observations would have been to understand the dynamics and instructional routines of the classroom. With the changes to the structure of school, Mrs. Halo assured me that the structure and routines were going to be quite different this year than in any previous year, and she was very honest in telling me that she really wasn't sure what school was going to look like. I had planned to observe in that classroom at least once a week for half of a grading period (4-5 weeks) in order to help the students to be familiar and comfortable with me and my presence in the classroom, and to gain a deep understanding of the context. I had planned to take notes during my observations and also keep a field journal with reflections during this period. I had also planned to use this time to gain parent and student permission. My intended data source from these observations was to be my field notes taken during the observations and my reflections written afterwards. Through our discussion, Mrs. Halo and I determined that we could revise my initial plan for data collection through observations and still be able to collect meaningful data.

Mrs. Halo agreed to participate in our group discussion and to share information with me regarding observations that she made during her time with the students, and she

agreed to explain the study intentions to her students and use my letter and permission slip to gain the necessary permissions for me. Because she had taught all of these five students previously, she already had positive relationships established with them and with their parents, making that process easier than it would have been for me coming in as an outsider. Mrs. Halo secured the permission slips for all five students to participate in the study. In addition, the school district had previously secured permission for each student to participate in the virtual learning platform and for their participation in that platform to be recorded. All students in our district had to have that two-way distance learning permission signed to begin the school year.

We also decided that I would begin joining her virtual class on Wednesdays, and I would participate in the virtual Wednesdays with these students for the majority of the first and second grading periods. We decided that because Wednesdays were the only learning model that was consistent and would be consistent throughout the semester, it made them most sense to use that platform for data collection. I began joining this class via Google Meets on September 16, 2020 and joined weekly each Wednesday through December 2, 2020. Each of these Google Meet virtual classes was 45 minutes in length. My participation in these meetings was two-fold. Six of my eleven visits were mainly to observe the interactions and instruction of the class. The purpose of the distance learning Wednesdays in our district is for a “check-in” of sorts. Teachers are asked to make sure that all of their students log in and have an opportunity to ask questions or get extra help. Because of this and the typical nature of Literacy Lab being very individualized, these Wednesday classes were very unstructured. However, I was able to observe the ways that these students interact with each other and with Mrs. Halo, and I was able to

see them from their homes which I would not have otherwise ever been able to do. My first three weeks (September 16, 2020; September 23, 2020, and September 30, 2020) of joining the class on Wednesday was mostly observational. I listened and sometimes joined in or answered questions when the students asked me things, but for the most part I watched and took notes about what I saw and what I heard. My observation notes of this virtual learning environment served as the data source for this collection method. In addition, each of these Google Meets was recorded, so I was able to return to them and watch them again after the class was over. For each of the six dates mentioned, I re-watched the recording and added to my notes from the initial observation. The second purpose of these Wednesday meetings was to conduct focus group discussions which I was able to do on five different occasions.

Group Discussions My original plan was to conduct 1-2 focus groups following my 4-5 weeks of observations. I intended to conduct the focus group(s) with the 4-5 students with whom I wanted to gather more data in order to gain a broad understanding of students' beliefs and feelings about reading and their background in reading. Because middle school students tend to be more open when they are in a peer group than they are when they meet one-on-one with an adult, I felt that this would be a good way to ease into data collection with students. As it turns out, this was one aspect of the data collection that I ended up relying more heavily on than I had intended to. Since there were only five total students in this class, I conducted the focus group discussions with all of them. The first focus group discussion with these students was on October 7, 2020. At that point in the data collection process, I had spent 3 weeks getting to know the students, and Mrs. Halo and I both felt like this was a good time to start the conversation. The first

focus group was very broad with general questions aimed at what they think and feel about reading, learning, and school. The purpose of this first conversation was to get the students warmed up and accustomed to me asking questions and used to talking. Following this group discussion, I conducted four more focus groups on the following dates: October 21, 2020; October 28, 2020; November 4, 2020; and December 2nd, 2020. During these focus group discussions, I used my interview protocol (Appendix B) as a guide for the discussions. At times the discussion veered from my intended questions, and I allowed the conversation to do so making note of questions that we did not address and/or adding questions that arose as we went. With each meeting, I returned to the interview protocol working back to questions that we hadn't covered or probing deeper into areas of discussion where I felt they may have more to say. Interview questions addressed topics such as: Reading Experiences and Interests, Experiences in Reading Intervention, Identity as a student, and Identity as a reader. Again, each Google Meet was recorded, so following the class period I watched and transcribed the Google Meet from the recording. Transcriptions of our recorded discussions, notes taken during the discussions and my reflections written after each meeting served as the data source for this collection method.

Student Documents. I had originally planned to collect student documents in the form of class assessment such as Leveled Literacy Intervention Assessments (LLI) and students' written responses to reading. However, in this truncated approach to school, the focus for learning was much different than in previous years. Much of the typical types of assignments and assessments were altered to meet the needs of students who had not been in school since March and needed some time to ease into the world of school again. In a

typical year, at least two Leveled Literacy Intervention Assessments (LLI) would be conducted in the first couple months of school. This was not a typical year, though, and this assessment was not given. Because there were so many changes to the overall schedule, to students' individual schedules, and to the learning platform, the start to the school year was much different than it had been in past years. More emphasis and time were given to acclimating students back to school, teaching them to wear masks and physical distance, and to instruction on how to log onto and learn through a digital platform. These new areas of emphasis superseded some of our typical approaches to instruction.

One structure that did continue was the administration of the MAP assessment. This was done as a requirement of Act 142 which stated that all students in grades K-9 had to be tested in reading and math within the first 10 days of the 2020-21 school year. Since our students began the year in a hybrid model and were only in person for 4 of those first 10 days, the decision was made for students to take the MAP test at home. This plan to have students take the MAP test virtual from home did not go well, and it's an understatement to say that the scores are not reliable data sources. Additionally, these students did not have Spring MAP scores to use a relevant data source due to the closure of in person learning in March of 2020. These factors left me with very little recent reading data on these students to begin the school year.

However, the decision was made among the Literacy Lab teachers in our district to focus the beginning of the school year on students' well-being and learn more about who our students are as readers. The Literacy Lab teachers (including Mrs. Halo) administered a Reader Identity Survey (Appendix C). The reader identity survey is a

series of questions created by the Literacy Lab teachers across the district. The survey is aimed at understanding how the students see themselves as readers. The purpose of the survey is for the classroom teacher to monitor students' views of reading and themselves as readers throughout the year. The Literacy Lab teachers agreed to conduct this survey with students at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Data from the beginning of the year survey conducted in September and the middle of the year survey conducted in December were used for this collection method. In addition to this survey, I was able to access students' previous test scores for the Reading MAP assessment (grades 2-7) and state standardized reading assessment (grades 3-6) as well as their individual RTI plans from elementary school. I used these data to help create a profile of each student's individual reading identity.

Interviews. When I initially planned the data collection for this study, I intended to conduct two individual interviews with each participant, and I intended for each of the individual interviews to be semi-structured using open-ended questions to focus on students' experiences as readers. However, once again, these plans were changed due to the restrictions and atypical learning structures. Since I could not meet with students in person to interview them and due to the fact that I did not want to pull them from the little actual class time that they had with their teachers, I chose to use some of the time that I spent during our virtual Wednesday meetings to pull students one-by-one to have individual conversations. Once I knew which three of the five students I would use for the case, and I had conducted most of the focus group discussions, I set aside some time for follow up individual interviews with each of the students. I used the breakout group feature in Google Meet to talk with students one at a time. The focus of these interviews

was to follow up on questions from the interview protocol that had not been answered yet and to follow up on responses that students had given that needed more clarification. Each virtual Wednesday meeting was 45 minutes in length, but I did not necessarily need this much individual time with each participant, so I used the time on November 4, 2020; November 11, 2020; and November 18, 2020 to interview students for approximately 25-30 minutes each and used the remaining time of those meetings to observe the class. Just like all other Wednesday meetings, the break out groups in Google Meet were recorded and then later transcribed by me. Each interview as well as my reflective notes serve as the data for this source.

Analytic Memos. The use of analytic memos was an ongoing data source throughout the entire 11 weeks of data collection. I used this writing process to help develop my ideas and better understand what the students' words and actions were telling me about how they are positioned as struggling readers and the ways that has impacted their reader identity. Maxwell (2013) explained the value of analytic memos as dependent upon serious reflection, analysis and self-critique as well as the systematic organization of memos for future access and examination. Following each of my Wednesday meetings with the students in this Literacy Lab class, I wrote an analytic memo to reflect upon what I was thinking and how my new learning and experiences with these students was developing in terms of my research. I tried to re-watch and transcribe each of these meetings shortly after they occurred as well and in doing so added to my memo anything pertinent that came from my second viewing and detailed transcribing of the experience. I returned to these memos during my coding process and used them as an important source of information to help me identify and name themes that I saw emerging in the data.

In all, the data collected included class observations, student documents, surveys, focus group discussions, and student interviews. Data from these various sources was analyzed and used to describe the collective and individual readers identities of the participants within this case study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study research produces huge amounts of raw data; therefore, it is essential to maintain the data in an organized and timely fashion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Huberman & Miles, 1983; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994, 1995; Yin, 2003). More importantly, it is crucial that preliminary data analysis should be conducted immediately following collection or as Merriam (1998) stated, “the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection” (p. 162). Stake emphasized, (1995) that data is continuously interpreted since qualitative research is inherently reflective, “in being ever reflective, the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating recollections and records....data [is] sometimes pre-coded but continuously interpreted, on first sighting and again and again” (p. 242). Maxwell (2013) also suggested not letting field notes, observation notes, and transcripts pile up but to analyze them as you go, treating analysis as part of the design. This was a crucial aspect of my data analysis process and will be described in more detail throughout this section.

Maxwell (2013) discussed the coding as taking place in three ways: “open coding, categorization analysis, and theoretical coding” (p. 107). Within that structure, he explains that categorization is often divided into two separate groups, substantive categories and organizational categories. Substantive categories are those that are more

descriptive in nature and lead to making connections between data sources, participants, and theories. Similarly, Stake (1995) discussed the difference between data analysis that focuses on categorizing versus analysis that focuses on connecting. He explained that, “Some narrative approaches to interview analysis are examples of connecting strategies” (p. 112). Throughout the analysis of these data, I utilized coding strategies that focused on recognizing the connections among and between participants’ experiences as well as coding strategies that sought to understand how these experiences relieve their reader identities.

The main goal of this dissertation research is to describe participants’ perspectives of their experiences with reading support, so it is also important that a narrative lens be used in the analysis of the data. As Glense (2016) explained, “If your research goal is to understand how participants construct meaning from their experiences and/or how they structure the narrating or telling of those experiences, then you will want to know about narrative analysis strategies” (p. 185). She went on to explain that a narrative analyst considers how the participant links their experiences and circumstances together to make meaning which directly aligns with the theories of identity that underpin this research. Because this research aims to describe the experiences and self-reported reader identities of students who have been labeled as struggling readers and who have, in many ways, been marginalized within the school system, the findings are primarily concerned with providing insight and understanding of participant’s unique circumstances and perspectives. The analysis of data is focused on uncovering how students describe their experiences and understand their reader identity. According to Stake (1995), “Qualitative research tries to establish an empathetic understanding for the reader, through

description, sometimes *thick description*, conveying to the reader what the experience itself would convey” (p. 39). Additionally, Flyberg (2006) wrote that, “Case studies often contain a substantial element of narrative. Good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of real life” (p. 237). Therefore, the purpose of this data analysis is to uncover how the reader identities of the participants are informed by their personal and social experiences; their experiences with reading in school; and their participation in reading intervention.

My process for data analysis began with notes and memos that I created during data collection. In addition to the field journal that I kept throughout the process, I also used my analytic memos to reflect upon initial impressions, connections to theory, and ways that I saw data shaping into stories as I transcribed recordings, analyzed documents, and read through journal notes. This form of analysis served to guide my thinking during the data collection process and ensured that the process is inductive in nature. Once those data were collected and transcribed and my initial thoughts had been recorded, I began the next phase of data analysis with open coding. Open-coding served as the 1st cycle of coding these data. I coded paper copies of the transcripts using different colors to represent the big ideas that emerged.

1st Cycle Coding

My data analysis process began during data collection. Following the collection of each data source (interview/focus group transcripts, observation notes, analytic memo, etc.), I engaged in open coding of the data. This process entailed a first reading to remind myself of the nuances of that experience and general annotation of each text for big ideas and initial concepts that emerged. I did this initial annotating without any particular type

of coding in mind and without looking for anything specific. Most of these ideas and concepts that emerged were written as sentences or phrases such as, *“Teachers and School Structure”*, *“Reading and Reading Support”*, *“Behavior Impacts Learning”* and *“Describing Reading Identity”*. After completing this step for each data source, I set the text aside until I was ready to begin the next cycle of coding.

2nd Cycle Coding

The next phase of analysis focused on using the concepts and phrases that were most meaningful and most prevalent during open coding to consider the types of connecting or substantive categories that were identifiable. I considered which of the open codes were most meaningful in terms of my research questions and relevant theoretical constructs. When I returned to each data source, I reorganized the format and created a chart to provide some structure for data and the themes and/or connections that I saw emerging. The chart was organized by topics or big ideas that emerged during open coding with the questions from each transcript guiding the structure. I organized the questions from my interview protocol as well as the additional questions that emerged during conversation by topic or big idea. The participant responses in the center column are a combination of direct quotes from the interviews and focus group discussion as well as summaries of responses that came during conversation and from student documents and mine and Mrs. Halo’s journaling. A small sample of this data organization is shown in Tables 3.2 and 3.3. My aim at this stage was to understand the places where I saw connections between participants, places where I saw connections between participants’ experiences and theories of identity, and places where I saw connections between the narratives that students tell of themselves and the ones that are told of them at school.

Table 3.2 Sample Responses Topic/Big Idea #1

Topic/Big Idea #1: Teachers/School Structure			
Question	Participant	Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italics are direct quotes • Parentheses are summaries of responses 	Themes/Connections Emerging
Why is it that you guys trust some teachers more than others?	Michelle	<i>It just depends on how they act...</i> <i>They say who they really are. Like if they say strict stuff like that, I would be like, oh, she's...</i> (Free time and being relaxed, calm and respectful) <i>She (Mrs. I) talk all the time. She just keep talking and talking and talking.</i>	Teacher approach matters Teacher authenticity matters Understanding students is crucial
	Davante	<i>It's the way the teacher acts</i> <i>It's like how a first impression show off, so I can see that if their cool at all</i> <i>When I first went to Ms J's class, she was cool. I like the way she teach. I like how the teachers start off. If you start out mean, I'm not going to like you.</i>	Mutual respect is crucial (mask example) Too much teacher talk is an issue (need to listen to the kids)
	Josh	<i>I don't know</i> <i>Yeah my science teacher is nice. She start off nice. I liked her on the first day. I knew that she would be a good teacher.</i> <i>They like have a good tone then that's how you can tell that their going to be a good teacher</i>	

		(Being relaxed and having a good tone) (choice)	
<p>Do you have any kids in your classes who you think are good readers or like to read?</p> <p>Do you hang out with those kids?</p>	Michelle	<p>(M- you don't know anyone?)</p> <p>M is friends with some readers and describes things that people her age read.</p> <p><i>I seen Dr. Ware really get into a book.</i></p>	<p>(very silent on this answer)</p> <p>Position in school</p>
	Davante	<p>(shakes head no)</p> <p>(Trey- you say no to hanging out with those kids)</p>	
	Josh	(shakes head no)	
<p>So does paying attention and participating mean that you are smart?</p> <p>So those who don't pay attention (like Trey) aren't smart?</p>	Michelle	<i>I mean, I don't think that anybody in our class is stupid.</i>	<p>They know that they are equally intelligent, but also know that students who "play school" well are positioned as smart.</p>
	Davante	<p><i>Yeah, in certain classes Cause I don't be paying attention in none of my classes because I don't care</i></p> <p>(says M is smarter than him)</p>	
	Josh	<i>Yeah. No, T's smart</i>	
<p>When did you stop caring?</p>	Michelle	<i>In 6th grade, I got a referral for hitting somebody because she hit me in the face (felt like there was some prejudice involved).</i>	<p>Behavior and positioning</p>
	Davante	<i>The first day I went to ISS in elementary school</i>	
	Josh	<p><i>I remember that I got a write up in 5th grade because I fought with someone</i></p> <p><i>In 6th grade I almost got expelled.</i></p>	

Table 3.3 Sample Responses Topic/Big Idea #2

Topic/Big Idea #2: Definition of Reading and Reading Support			
How do you feel when you hear someone say that it's time to read or we're going to read?	Michelle	<i>It just depends. I don't mind reading It depends on my mood because I like reading certain books</i>	Teacher Influence impacts reading motivation and desire
	Davante	<i>Same thing J said (teacher impact)</i>	Choice impacts reading motivation and attitude towards reading
	Josh	<i>Honest, honest? It depends if the teacher makes it fun</i>	
How does the teacher make it fun? What is the difference between it being fun and boring?	Michelle	<i>When we get to choose the book we read.</i>	Lack of teacher support affects reader motivation
	Davante	<i>Boring for me is like when somebody is trying to make you read even though you don't understand.</i> (Reading the hero's journey assignment in ELA)- <i>I understand it a little bit but at some point I didn't understand and that was aggravating.</i>	
	Josh	<i>Well, being fun is like she helps you and like she doesn't like be mean and all that but boring is like do this work and do this. Like all of that. That's boring.</i> (same as what T said)	
What would you do if you don't understand something in Lit Lab?	Michelle	<i>I would ask you. I would tell you that I need help to understand it better.</i> (How would your ELA teacher respond to you?) <i>Figure it out yourself.</i>	Support from teachers matters (Tier 1 is important)

		<i>Yeah sometimes I feel uncomfortable with a that because like if I don't understand something see like this is what I'm trying to say, the teacher always want us to come to them when we need help when we're working on an assignment and we ask for help and they tell us to figure it out ourselves.</i>	
	Davante	<i>(why can you ask in Lit Lab and not your ELA teacher?) Because she isn't gonna give me the type of answer you will give me.</i>	
	Josh	<i>In Lit Lab you gonna help me understand what the word means or give me an example or put in another way that makes sense.</i>	
<p>When you get asked a question about a story or text that you are reading, do you think that there's only one correct answer?</p> <p>Do you think that teachers are looking for one answer?</p> <p>If you got different answers would you all be right?</p>	Michelle	<i>Sometimes I feel like that</i> <i>The teacher will say oh, there's multiple answers that are right, but the students will only see one and the teacher will tell them to keep looking.</i> <i>Like it depends on the story and what the teacher gives you.</i> Yeah	<p>If reading is right and wrong, it's hard to be right all the time- makes most people a poor reader.</p>
	Davante	(shakes head, no) <i>We could but for me, I wouldn't think that we would all be right because there's probably one right answer that's right from my experience.</i>	
	Josh	<i>No</i> <i>It depends</i> <i>I really don't know how to explain it.</i> <i>One of us would be.</i>	

<p>How do you feel when you take standardized tests like SCReady or MAP.</p> <p>How much do you care about those tests (1-5)</p>	Michelle	5	Impact of standardized testing
	Davante	<p>1 (doesn't care)</p> <p><i>The reason that I said that I don't care is that there is always something wrong about what I do.</i></p>	
	Josh	<p><i>I feel kinda good. Because I'm not sure if I'm going to pass or not, so I'm unsure.</i></p> <p><i>4. Sometimes I care a little</i></p>	
<p>What do you think those tests have to do with reading?</p>	Michelle	<i>I don't know. Maybe see how good we are at it?</i>	Positioned by testing
	Davante	<p><i>See what type of reading level you are. I've always been on a low reading level. For some reason I've never been on the reading level for the grade that I am in. Even in elementary I've always been on the lower level. I was in the 6th grade and I was on a 2nd grade reading level.</i></p> <p><i>(How do you know what reading level you are on) I saw my teacher's paper one time.</i></p>	
	Josh	<i>I don't even know what reading level I'm on.</i>	
<p>If you could pick what you want to read, what would you pick?</p>	Michelle	<i>I like to read graphic novels, nonfiction, and fiction books</i>	Know what they like to read.
	Davante	<p><i>Pick what I'm reading?</i></p> <p><i>I would read stuff about dirt bikes</i></p>	Not used to having choice in school.

		<i>Like how to rebuild a whole new bike</i> (do you ever have trouble understanding those books?) <i>Yeah. Sometimes the directions are hard to understand. If I know how to put the bike together, then it's not hard. I just try to play with the actual dirt bike and try to figure it out.</i>	
	Josh	<i>I would just read about sports. Sometimes I like to read</i>	

Those themes and connections that emerged during this cycle led me to begin looking at the data with a narrative lens as I was seeking to understand how each student's reading identity has been formed and is described by them.

3rd Cycle Coding

My goal with this next cycle of coding was to employ a narrative lens to the themes and connections that emerged previously by using *Value Coding* to identify beliefs and attitudes towards reading. Saldana (2009) explains that, "Values Coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (p.89). This form of coding was directly related to what I was seeking to understand about my participants.

Additionally, Saldana writes that value coding is appropriate for almost all kinds of qualitative studies and particularly ones that seek to describe the culture and values of participants and explore their experiences and actions in case studies. During this phase, I took the themes and connections from the previous cycle of coding and organized them into a new chart still keeping the broad topics/big ideas from the 1st coding cycle as an

organizational structure. In terms of value coding, I was looking for the experiences that caused beliefs/attitudes towards reading identity and student or adult actions around reading that may have informed participants' reader identities. After analyzing the data for value codes, I went back over it with the lens of *Pattern Coding* focusing on patterns of social and human relationships that impact reader identity. A sample of this cycle of coding can be found in Table 3.4.

As I added the grouped codes to my electronic document and began to analyze them, I found myself reorganizing them slightly because the process of naming the categories caused me to re-evaluate some of my initial thinking. After categorizing each group of codes, I look for categories that could be grouped to create even larger categories that were the result of further analysis. The larger categories were: *Reading Choice, Reading Skills, Behavior and Learning, Vocabulary and Words, Impact of Intervention, Teacher Impact, Personal Experience with Reading, and Positioning in School*. Table 4 shows a sample of this stage of analysis.

During my analysis, I noticed connections between my value and pattern codes. I found that most of my pattern codes were grouped as actions and seemed to stand on their own. I think some of this has to do with how I coded the data originally. I noticed that I tended to code experiences that were more action-oriented as experience and the experiences that were connected to positioning in school as personal.

Therefore, there were more connections between the pattern codes of personal experiences and the value codes of beliefs and attitudes. I found myself grouping these together in various categories where I saw connections.

Table 3.4 *Sample of 3rd Cycle Coding*

Topic/Big Idea: Teachers/School Structure		
Themes/Connections from 2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle Coding Value Coding	3rd Cycle Coding Pattern Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher's approach to student matters Teacher's approach to reading matters Teacher authenticity matters Understanding students is crucial Mutual respect is crucial (mask example) Too much teacher talk is an issue (need to listen to the kids) 	Students value teachers who value them	Student/teacher relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position in school impacts beliefs about ability They know that they are equally intelligent, but also know that students who "play school" well are positioned as smart. Behavior and positioning 	Adult beliefs impact students' identities	Schools position students
Topic/Big Idea: Definition of Reading and Reading Support		
Themes/Connections from 2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle Coding Value Coding	3rd Cycle Coding Pattern Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher Influence impacts reading motivation Choice impacts reading motivation and desire 	Choice matters Relationships matter	Student/teacher relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of teacher support affects reader motivation Support from teachers matters (Tier 1 is important) 	Teacher Support	Student/teacher relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If reading is right and wrong, it's hard to be right all the time- makes most people a poor reader. 	Tests of defeating	Testing positions students

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impact of standardized testing on beliefs about reading ● Students positioned in school by testing 	Reading is seen as right or wrong	Testing creates division
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students know what they like to read ● Students are not accustomed to having choice in school. 	Choice matters	School structures position students

This did not really surprise me. I'm sure that part of the reason that I saw these connections is my theoretical lens and belief that reading is a sociocultural process, but I also think it's pretty logical to assume that students' beliefs and attitudes about reading stem from their personal experiences.

Both the individual reader identities as well as their commonalities will be explored in the findings section. The remaining groups of codes all pointed to the factors that impact reader identity, and I was able to organize those codes into four categories: *Teacher/Student Relationships*, *Students' behavior and learning*, *The role of school structures*, and *The impact of reading support*.

These categories will serve as the structure for the findings section and will serve to address the major research questions of: How do adolescent readers in a reading intervention program present themselves as readers? What do these students see as the major impacts on their reader identities? How do students describe the reading support that they have received in reading intervention?

Table 3.5 *Sample of Categories*

<p>Reading Choice Reading Choice Agency as a reader Book Selection Matters Choice and Interest Connected Experiences impact interest Choice matters Book selection is personal Reading is interesting with choice</p> <hr/> <p>Behavior and Learning Behavior impacts learning “Smart” kids have better behavior Engagement in class lessens behavior issues Behavior affects academic position Attitude impacts learning Anger and frustration impact learning Behavior impacts learning Behavior impacts student’s reader identity Teachers response to behavior is important</p> <hr/> <p>Impact of Intervention Literacy Lab is a safe place Learning in Literacy Lab isn’t all about reading Literacy Lab teacher supports the whole child</p> <hr/> <p>Teacher Impact Student Teacher Relationships Teachers allow choice Students value teachers who value them Adult beliefs impact students’ identities Teacher’s approach matters Teachers impact reading motivation Teachers influence reader identity Teachers make reading interesting</p>	<p>Reading Skills Reading is learning Reading is for info. Reading can be frustrating Reading can be interesting Reading is taught Reading is about right or wrong Reading is boring when it’s difficult Reading is valued Reading brings joy Reading is about connections to stories</p> <hr/> <p>Vocabulary and Words Reading is about words Vocabulary makes reading hard Language is right or wrong Lack of vocabulary is frustrating Acquire language with instruction Learn language word by word</p> <hr/> <p>Personal Experience with Reading Describing Books Using reading strategies Memories of reading at home No memories of reading at home Memories of reading at school Lack of engagement with reading</p> <hr/> <p>Positioning in School Schools position students</p>
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	School structures create division Testing positions students Testing creates division School structures create division Not all students are treated the same
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Researcher Positionality

The relationship between the researcher and the study participants and the researcher's perspective and experiences are crucial aspects of any qualitative research (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Kim, 2006; Maxwell, 2013, Glesne, 2016). Both Pinnegar & Daynes (2006) and Kim (2016) write about how one's interpretations of someone else's experiences play a role in the understanding and the retelling of another person's story. This has been a crucial aspect of my research design as I will explore in this section.

I realize that my positionality most definitely impacted the data that I was able to gather with students and the depth of information that students were willing to share with me. It was clear at first that students were uneasy about sharing information with me, and they needed continuous reassurance that I was not going to share their personal information with their other teachers or with anyone at their school. As time went by, they became much more comfortable with me and began to trust me. One of the main reasons that I was allowed into their world as a trusted adult because Mrs. Halo introduced me as someone to be trusted. Utilizing her as a "gatekeeper" was extremely helpful in gathering information with the students. Her presence in our conversations allowed me to become an insider in their world, and the relationships that she had built

with these students over the course of two school years was crucial in them trusting her and me with their stories.

While I see my positionality as providing several advantages, there were also challenges to consider. My perspectives about reading and the reading process are from the position of someone who has taught reading, studied reading, and now someone who supervises those who teach reading. This position affords me the opportunity to see reading instruction from many perspectives except for that of the participant. While I will seek to understand the reader's perspective, I will never fully be able to see the world from where he or she views it or be able to fully understand the circumstances of these students. I will also never be able to fully understand how the participant views me or how their view of me impacts what they do and do not share with me. Utilizing strategies such as member checking and rapport building with my participants will hopefully negate some of the weaknesses that my position as an administrator and adult authority figure may create.

Another important aspect of my positionality that had to be considered throughout my data collection and analysis was the possibility of misinterpreting or overinterpreting what the students shared with me because of my own perspective and background. Both Blatti (1997) and Gluck (2013) explore this concept of interpretive nature of oral history. In view of this dissertation research, I would apply this idea to any form of telling someone else's story. Their views on the interpretive nature of oral history are focused on how the consumer of the information receives and interprets what they see, hear, or view. The way that information is received is largely based on the receiver's knowledge and background as well as the dominant voice of the topic or time period being

examined. How I interpret or “hear” what my participants tell me will greatly impact how their stories are relayed.

Blatti (1997) wrote, “The effort to recast lay and scholarly constructions of history has its origins in a dissatisfaction with the current perceptions of narrators and audiences, often drawn from the groups in society” (p.64). Additionally, Gluck (2013) discusses the ways that oral history can bring the participant’s story to life within the “broader social context”. I saw connections to my research in what Gluck and Blatti were saying. Especially when I consider the current research that exists regarding reading intervention programs and purpose. Currently, the narrative around reading intervention is teacher-centered, and this study seeks to tell a counter-narrative from the point of view of students.

Because the participants in this study are thirteen-year-old and fourteen-year-old students, I am considerably different than they are in age, academic background, and perspectives on education. The participants in this study are also from varying backgrounds as far as culture, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are concerned, so while I share some commonalities with some of the students in those areas, there are also many differences in our experiences.

Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

Through my data collection process, I employed prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking (Maxwell, 2013, Glesne, 2016) to ensure trustworthiness in my data and my analysis. In an effort to monitor my positionality during data collection, I began by taking time to build rapport with my participants. I

spent time with the students in their virtual Wednesday Literacy Lab class so that they began to see me as a regular part of that environment.

As I collected data through classroom discussion in their virtual environment, I engaged in peer review by asking Mrs. Halo to confirm or reject what I have recorded in my observation notes or help me to understand the context in which I was observing. I also engage in member checking with my participants to ensure that information I gathered during the interviews was accurate and portrayed what they feel and believe. Member checking is an important part of triangulating (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Kim, 2006; Maxwell, 2013, Glesne, 2016) the researcher's observations and interpretations.

When research participants review interview transcripts, observation notes or narrative text they often provide corroboration and feedback (Stake, 1995). Each research participant was given many opportunities to review data materials and provide further response to the research questions. It was my hope that by involving my participants in the research and building rapport with them and their teachers, that I was able to better monitor my own positionality. In addition to prolonged observations and time spent in the classroom, I interviewed each of my participants multiple times. Four times as part of a focus group discussion and twice individually.

Limitations

My intention with this study was to understand how adolescent students, who have been continuously served in reading intervention, describe their experiences with reading and themselves as readers. Therefore, this research is limited in its scope. I cannot assume that what I have learned about my three participants will apply to all

adolescent readers receiving reading support. However, I do hope that what has been gleaned from them may be used by educators to think more deeply about the students they work with.

One area of limitation for this study has been the impact of COVID-19 on my original plans for this study as well as ways that data collection was possible. The change in school structures such as programming, enrollment, and delivery of instruction had a significant impact on the ways that I was able to collect data and have access to students. Moreover, student interactions and student-teacher interactions were often different in the virtual setting than the traditional classroom setting. While I was able to work around these constraints to design a study that did ultimately produce useful and relevant data, the limitations most certainly impacted those data.

Because this research with these readers took place during their eighth-grade year, their individual memories of previous experiences may not always be reliable or detailed. While I was able to find some information about their previous reading instruction and how their previous reading intervention was designed, I do not have specific or detailed information about those experiences. I am also relying on the participants' memories of certain schooling experiences and intervention as well as their perceptions of what they have experienced. I do believe that in understanding these readers, perception becomes reality, but it is also important to note that they each have a unique perspective. The findings are also limited by what the participants were willing to share, and therefore, I must consider that I may not have gotten the entire story from them.

Because these methods and the nature of my inquiry required me to gather detailed information from students about what they think and how they feel, I recognized

that there were times that students were reluctant to share. Sometimes this reluctance presented itself as silence; other times turning off their cameras or just saying, “I don’t want to talk about that”. Gluck (2013) and Portelli (2004) both address positionality and its role in gathering data. Gluck (2013) writes about the way that cultural likeness can greatly promote trust and openness, while difference can reinforce cultural and social distance. I saw where this idea may have had a role in my data collection. Being an adult, a school administrator, and possibly a different race or socioeconomic status than the students with whom I collected information may have been cause for “social distance.” I do believe that the way our interviews were structured and the questions were asked was crucial in eliciting important information and mitigating as much of the “social distance” as possible. A conversation, semi-structured approach and speaking with the students as a whole group for several weeks before the individual interviews was crucial. This helped to create a more conversational interview and get closer to the “quasi-monologue” structure that Gluck (2013) writes about.

Lastly, Portelli’s (2004) views on positionality gave me more solace in terms of my data collection. He wrote about the importance of equality in the interviewer/interviewee relationship and explained that equality cannot be wished into being. Portelli’s stance focused on creating equality where an imbalance may exist. My impression was that this can be done when there is a partnership created between the two, and the meaning that comes from the interview is co-created. Portelli seems to caution against the interviewer removing themselves or their viewpoint from this partnership when he writes about playing the objective researcher and being rewarded with biased data. He also tells us that the credibility comes from the researcher understanding what

they bring into the analysis of data. This assertion puts my mind at ease a little and gives me hope that I have established situations that allowed for equality and honest dialogue.

Conclusion

Because reading is a process that relies so heavily on a person's identity, experience, and perspectives, it is crucial to understand the process from the reader's perspective. Through the data collection process, I have sought to understand the experiences of adolescent readers who are served in reading intervention and who continue to be identified as struggling with school-based reading tasks. By attempting to understand their struggle and their experience with reading intervention, I hope to be able to find ways to better support these students as well as help to guide the teachers who work with them to better support their needs. I do not intend for the specific findings about the participants to be generalized to all students, but I do hope that through the process I am able to use the information gathered to help educators think differently about how we serve our struggling adolescent readers. The findings from this study will not only shed light on who these readers are and how they describe themselves, but it may also give insight as to why these students who have received reading support for many years are still being labeled as struggling during adolescence.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The aim of this dissertation research was to gain insight and understanding of adolescent readers who are being served in reading intervention during their middle school years and who have previously received reading support in elementary school.

The findings of this study address the three major research questions:

1. How do adolescent readers in a reading intervention program present themselves as readers?
2. What do these students see as the major impacts on their reader identities?
3. How do students describe the reading support that they have received in reading intervention?

Through the use of focus group discussions, individual interviews, and document analysis students' individual reader identities as well as their collective beliefs about reading and reading support were revealed. The findings in this chapter are organized to demonstrate the ways that data supported each of the research questions.

The data show that students hold both collective and individual beliefs and identities in terms of reading and reading support. Each student has their own experiences and perspectives that have influenced their reader identity, and students also share common beliefs and experiences. In order to demonstrate each student's individual identity, the first section of this chapter describes each participant's individual perspective

and identity in terms of the three major research questions. The next section is organized to describe students' collective beliefs and address the first research question through the themes of: Reading Choice and Interest, Vocabulary and Language, and Personal and Social Experiences with Reading. The third section will address the second major research questions by outlining students' perceptions of what has impacted them as readers through the themes of teacher support, their participation in reading intervention, and behavior concerns. Each of these being factors that have influenced their identity as readers. The last section of this chapter will address the third research question by describing the types of reading support students have received and how they view the impact that support has had on them as readers.

Individual Reader Identities

Through our time together over the course of two months, I was able to gain an understanding of how each of these students views themselves as a reader. Each participant's story is a description of their reader identity as told in their own words, through their writing, and by their responses to survey questions. This section outlines the individual reader identities of each of the three participants.

The Story of Michelle, an Eager Reader

How Michelle presents herself as a reader. Michelle likes to read and talk about books. She is eager to describe her reading experiences and to share details about stories that she enjoys. Reading is something that she thinks is fun, but is also something that she believes is a good reader when she finds something that she likes to read.

Michelle identifies as a strong reader who enjoys the experience. She is connected to Mrs. Halo and to her peers in Literacy Lab, but she also seems to be connected to the

school as a whole. She understands the purpose of being in Literacy Lab and sees the support as something that helps her to be a good student. She knows that reading was difficult for her in elementary school, but doesn't see reading as something that she cannot do or is bad at. She understands the importance of being a good reader and sees herself as being a strong student.

Michelle was very participatory in our virtual conversations and during the observations I conducted of her virtual Literacy Lab class. She was typically the first one to answer the questions posed to the group and seemed to enjoy engaging with both the adults and students in our discussions. She was an eager participant and did not hesitate to answer my questions, even asking if I'd be joining the class one week when I wasn't able to. During our October 21st Google Meet, Mrs. Halo commented that, "We know Michelle will talk anywhere, anytime, to anyone about anything." She presented herself as confident about school and her place in it and demonstrated excitement and enthusiasm when she talked about jobs she might want to have in the future.

Michelle reports that she loves to read. She always has. She describes herself as a good reader (Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020; focus group, October 28, 2020) who is good at reading aloud and to herself, and as someone who reads at a good rate (interview, November 4, 2020). When asked how she knows that she is a good reader, Michelle answered by saying, "Because I find the right book that's right for me. And I read through it and go slowly to understand the book and the theme of what's going on in the book." (interview, November 4, 2020). Michelle is also very focused on how quickly she reads and seems to think that being able to read fast when she reads aloud is a sign of her being a good reader. When answering a question in the Reader

Identity Survey about a time that she needed help with reading, Michelle wrote that, “I noticed how I was reading really slow and that I needed to start reading fast, so I went to Book Club and the people helped me with my reading a lot.” She also believes that she reads enough to be the best reader that she can be (Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020). It is evident from these examples that Michelle understands that reading involves thinking and that she can improve her reading skills with effort and instruction.

Factors impacting Michelle’s reader identity. In our interviews together, Michelle described that as a very young child, she loved to be read to. She had a bookshelf full of books in her room and every chance she got, she had one in her hand. She would quickly flip through the pages and use her words to describe the pictures while creating the stories that she imagined were happening. Her aunts, grandmother, and parents would read to her often, and even now, she can recall the names of books that they read to her. “Um... My mom used to read to me when I was little and she would read The Three Little Pigs. And there was another book... I forgot what it was called, but she would read The Little Pigs.” (interview, November 4, 2020).

She loves to tell stories of teachers who introduced her to books that she loves and of her family members who read. She has a grandmother who is reading the Bible and a mother who is reading books to, “learn about what is going on around the world” (interview, November 4, 2020). By her own account, Michelle is a reader. While her test scores on the state’s standardized reading assessment show that she is below grade level, a measure that labels her as a “struggling reader”. Michelle doesn’t see herself that way, but she does know that her Literacy Lab class is supposed to help her become a better reader. She works hard in school and wants to do something either in education or related

to human services when she's an adult. It's clear from our discussions that she believes that is possible and sees school a way to achieve her goals.

In the third grade, Michelle began taking reading tests that seemed to be very important to all of the adults. It made Michelle feel anxious to think about these tests, especially because her teacher seemed very stressed about them. In her opinion, the tests were weird; they were not at all like the kind of reading that Michelle was used to. They asked strange questions and focused a lot on being right or wrong, and a lot of the reading passages were about things that Michelle had never heard of. During one of our conversations, Michelle was asked if she thinks teachers are looking for one answer when they ask questions about reading and if two students have different answers, can they both be correct. She responded by saying that, "We could be, but for me I would not think that we would all be right because there's probably one right answer that right from my experience" (focus group, October 28, 2020).

Michelle explained that she did not want to take reading tests, but just wanted to read the books that she loved with her friends and family and write stories that were meaningful to her (interview, November 4, 2020). As it turned out, Michelle did not do very well on reading tests during her elementary or middle school years. Her range of scores on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading Assessment from Fall of 2013 to Fall of 2020 show scores inconsistently ranging from the 9th percentile to the 29th percentile and performance level for the past four (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019) administrations of the state reading assessment show her scoring "Does Not Meet Expectations". This meant that Michelle had to attend Book Club during her elementary

school years and which eventually led to her being put in Literacy Lab at her middle school.

Michelle's description of reading support. When she started Kindergarten, she was excited to read the books that the teacher had in her classroom, and she loved when the teacher would read aloud to the class. She enjoyed writing and drawing about her family and her friends. However, in second grade, something changed, she started to realize that she did not read books the same way other children did and her teacher started sending her to something called, "Book Club". Book Club was a place where she and a few other students went to read with a different teacher. They talked about books and read together. Sometimes they got to choose what they read and sometimes they did not. Michelle did not love Book Club at first. She did not like having to leave her regular classroom or having to miss time with her friends. She did like the individual attention that she received from her Book Club teacher, but she really wanted to be in her classroom with her friends choosing the books that she liked to read (interview, November 18, 2020). She enjoys her Literacy Lab class because she is able to choose the books that she reads, and she is given a lot of time to talk about books with her teacher. She also likes Literacy Lab because her teacher spends a lot of time getting to know her personally and trying to help her find books where the characters were like her. Mrs. Halo doesn't spend a lot of time worrying about reading tests or whether Michelle's reading was "good" or "bad", but rather spent time talking about the reasons why Michelle wanted to read and how she could use the information. When asked about the impact that Literacy Lab has had on her as a reader, Michelle stated that, "It's been really fun being in that class...we read books and you [Mrs. Halo] ask really good questions

about the book. It's actually been pretty chill in Mrs. Halo's class." (interview, November 18, 2020). It's clear from her description of Literacy Lab that her time in that environment has impacted how she views reading and herself as a reader.

Michelle's peers in her Literacy Lab class describe her as the smartest student in their class and the ones who pays attention the most. Michelle also thinks that she's the smartest student in the class (focus group, October 28, 2020). She knows that she can read for a long time without wanting to stop and chooses books that "seem interesting when she looks at them" (focus group, October 21, 2020). She also works hard to understand what she is reading, to make predictions while she reads, and to read with questions in her head that she tries to answer.

The Story of Davante, a reluctant and disengaged reader

How Davante presents himself as a reader. Davante does not like to read, and he never has. Reading was difficult for him in elementary school and not something that he wanted to do then or that he wants to do now. Davante doesn't trust adults easily and reports that he has gotten in a lot of trouble with his behavior during his time in school. When he feels supported by or connected to a teacher, he is much more likely to engage in learning, but when that connection and support is lacking, he will quickly disengage. His relationship with Mrs. Halo is an important part of his experience in Literacy Lab as well as how he sees himself as a reader.

Davante isn't sure what he wants to do when he finishes high school, but he is sure that he plans to graduate. He still doesn't have a favorite book, but will read texts about sports and dirt bikes if he has to (Reader Response, *My History as a Reader*, November 12, 2020).

Davante's Reading MAP scores from the Fall of 2013 to the Spring of 2020 show percentile ranks that range from the 3rd percentile to the 29th percentile with just over half of the scores being single digit percentiles. His performance levels on the state's standardized assessment show Davante scoring *Approaches Expectations* in 2016 as a third-grade student and then show him scoring *Does Not Meet Expectations* for the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades (2017-2019). These are data points that were used to determine his continuation in reading intervention over the years.

Factors impacting Davante's reader identity. Davante presented himself as reluctant to participate or engage in the virtual classes that I observed and in our virtual discussion. He almost always had his camera turned off and only responded to questions when he was directly asked something. On a few occasions, he was late to joining the virtual class because he was walking home from Walmart or out meeting the school bus to pick up his meals for the day that were delivered by the school district (focus group, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020; October 28, 2020). During our October 14th Google Meet, his one-year brother joined him for most of the class period. He proudly turned his camera on that day to show us his baby brother on his lap and to tell us that he was helping to take care of him that day. When Mrs. Halo asked him, "What does he call you?" Davante responded by saying, "He's only one; he barely know how to talk." (focus group, October 14, 2020). He went on to explain that the baby just yells when he wants his attention which led to a discussion among all of the students about babies and how they communicate.

Despite many attempts to engage Davante in sharing about his family and home life, I was never able to get Davante to share much. There are some conclusions to be

drawn from things that I observed and was able to connect to what he did share. For example, his caring for his younger brother during virtual Wednesday classes, is a clue that there may not have been other adult support in the home at the time. It is a small window into seeing that Davante has other responsibilities beyond school. Knowing that he had to leave class a few times to meet the school bus delivering lunches to his neighborhood also gives me a clue that those meals provided by the school district are important to him and his socioeconomic status has an impact on his education. His reluctance to share is also a clue that perhaps there are things that he doesn't want other people to know. The reasons for that, I am not sure of. I do know, though, that sometimes what is not said can have even a greater impact than what is. I know that there is a lot more to Davante than I was able to uncover in our time together, but what I did learn gave me some insight into who he has become as a reader.

Davante doesn't recall reading at home when he was young and doesn't remember reading much other than in school and even those memories are spotty for him. He remembers reading in school sometimes and mostly with his Book Club teacher. Davante likes to read books about dirt bikes; especially ones that explain how to fix them (interview, November 11, 2020). He doesn't see himself as a reader and doesn't really like to read. When asked if reads difficult books, Davante responded by writing, "No, because I don't like reading." (Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020). During one of our Google Meeting discussions, Maybelle told the students that she was going to turn the conversation to be about reading. Davante responded by saying, "I'm going on mute." (focus group, October 28, 2020). This was one of several times that he demonstrated discomfort when talking about reading and was reluctant to share. His disengagement

with this topic was a clear sign that he is uncomfortable with how others see him as a reader which, in turn, has impacted his personal reader identity.

Davante's description of reading support. Davante never really directly described his experiences with reading support, but through his descriptions of school in general, I was able to glean some understanding of how his participation in reading intervention has impacted him. In learning what I did about Davante, I would conclude that the biggest impact reading intervention has on him as a reader and as an individual is the role that his participation has played in positioning him as a struggling reader.

Davante's experiences in school are very connected to the adults with whom he has built relationships or the adults who he sees as having marginalized him. For the teachers with whom he has built positive relationships, he is very connected and can be encouraged to participate and accomplish work. When asked about one of his favorite teachers who was no longer going to be his teacher because she was moved from teaching face-to-face to teaching virtually at the end of the 1st quarter, he responded by saying, "I don't want to talk about it." but later commented that, "When I first went to Mrs. Johnson's (pseudonym) class, I liked the way she teach. I like how teachers start off. If you start out mean, I'm not going to like you." (focus group, October 14, 2020). Similarly, when asked how Mrs. Halo's class has impacted him, Davante responded by saying, "I probably wouldn't be the same person if I did not have your class...I'd be a bad person. When I go to Mrs. Halo's class, I know that I can make it through the rest of my day." (interview, November 18, 2020). His connection to Mrs. Halo and his comments about Mrs. Johnson demonstrates the very important role that positive teacher relationships have played in his school career.

In addition to these positive examples, Davante often reports times when teachers have made him mad or when teachers have treated him unfairly. It is clear from our conversations (focus group, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020, and October 28, 2020) that he will not work hard for a teacher who he doesn't think respects him or that he perceives as not willing to work with him to be flexible. Davante often proclaims that he doesn't care about reading and doesn't care about school. When asked when he stopped caring, he responded by saying, "The first day that I went to ISS in elementary school" (focus group, October 28, 2020). Davante went on to explain that he spent a great deal of time in the office during elementary school. By his account, it was almost daily. "Every time I do something dumb, I would be in the front office" (focus group, October 28, 2020). When probed further to talk about his time spent out of class missing instruction, we asked Davante if his reading problems caused his behavior issues or if his behavior issues caused his reading problems. At first, he wasn't sure, but eventually responded by saying, "My behavior issues caused my reading problems" (focus group, October 28, 2020). This breakthrough led to important conversation among all of the students about behavior and learning which emerged as one of the common factors impacting reader identity that will be discussed later.

His position in school has also affected the way that Davante sees himself as a reader. When asked about whether he knows any students in the Gifted Program, Davante responded by saying, "I don't care about none of them" (interview, November 11, 2020). When pushed to say more about the ways that students are placed in levels of classes, his responses were, "I really don't care." and "It don't bother me." (interview, November 11,

2020). It seems that Davante doesn't trust all of his teachers, and a great deal of this mistrust seems to stem from his experiences with teachers responding to his behavior.

The Story of Josh, a reader caught in between

How Josh presents himself as a reader. Josh is caught in between believing that he is a strong reader and enjoying the process and seeing reading as a difficult and unnecessary. Josh doesn't mind reading. He doesn't hate it, but he doesn't love it. He thinks he's "okay" at it and will do it for school because he has to or if he's' reading something that he likes (usually something about sports). Josh was comfortable participating in our discussions. He shared openly, but wanted to make sure that he could be honest and that our discussions would be confidential. He was usually engaged in the discussions and liked talking about school and reading. He was quick to comment on how he felt about virtual Wednesdays, his other teachers, and his classmates.

Josh loves sports and particularly baseball. His room is decorated with sports memorabilia and mementos, and he was often seen with a ball in his hands during our virtual meets. When asked about the types of books that he likes to read, Josh reports that he will read "books that are interesting to him" and books about "sports" (focus group, October 14, 2020; Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020). As a reader, Josh describes himself as, "in the middle" (focus group, October 28, 2020). He is pretty positive about his interactions at school and his interactions with teachers, but he's also honest about what teachers do that is helpful and what they do that isn't. He reports that it isn't helpful when teachers don't grade his work quickly or when they don't explain where he's made mistakes (focus group, October 21, 2020). He seems to want feedback from teachers as long as it's constructive, and he knows how to use the information.

Josh thinks that he wants to go into the field of education, and he thinks that he might want to be a coach. He knows that people read books that are difficult for them “to challenge themselves” and when reading is difficult teachers can help make it easier (Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020). When asked how he feels when someone says it’s time to read, he responded by asking if he could be “Honest-honest.” When told that he could, Josh responded that, “Sometimes it could be fun only if the teacher makes it fun.” From his perspective, reading is fun when, “...she helps you and like she doesn’t be mean and all.” (focus group, October 21, 2020). Josh’s communication with us about reading demonstrates that trusted relationships with adults are an important part of forming his reader identity.

Factors that have impacted Josh’s reader identity. Josh reports feeling “kind of good” about reading tests because he’s “not sure if I’m gonna pass or not” (focus group, October 21, 2020). He seems to know that there are some inequities in the way that schools are organized, but he cannot really explain what he knows or why he thinks that. When asked if he thinks that all students have the same opportunities in school, Josh responded by saying, “Maybe. Maybe not. Um, I really don’t know how to explain it (focus group, October 28, 2020). He also shared that, “I remember that I got a write up in fifth grade because I fought with someone. In sixth grade, I almost got expelled.” In his opinion, these events were his fault, but he also thinks that some teachers react to behavior by kicking students out of class before they understand what really happened (focus group, October 28, 2020).

Josh’s Reading MAP scores from the Fall of 2013 to the Fall of 2020 show percentile ranks that range from the 15th percentile to the 35th percentile with most of his

scores being around the 25th percentile. He has one outlying score in the 56th percentile in the Spring of 2016. His performance levels on the state's standardized assessment show Josh scoring *Approaches Expectations* in 2016 as a third-grade student and then show him scoring *Does Not Meet Expectations* for the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades (2017-2019). These are data points that were used to determine his continuation in reading intervention over the years.

Despite some of the negative experiences he has had in school, Josh is still willing to do what is expected of him and even though he doesn't think all of his teachers are fair or equally effective, he does what he's supposed to and still sees school as an avenue for what he wants to do in the future.

Josh's description of reading support. He enjoys Literacy Lab because he feels comfortable in that class and likes Mrs. Halo. He does okay in his other classes and likes them as long as the teacher is "cool" and he feels like he or she cares about him. He understands the purpose of Literacy Lab and is willing to do what he needs to do to improve his reading and do well in school as long as it's not too hard. Overall, he's been a pretty average student and mostly does what is expected of him.

During our October 21st discussion, Josh told us that he liked virtual days and treated them like any other day of school. He shared that, "what I do is brush my teeth and do all that other stuff and act like it's a regular school day." It could be concluded that Josh probably had an adult or two at home making sure that he was up and ready for school and continuing his regular routine even when school was virtual. Josh seemed to get along well with his classmates and was typically the one sharing supportive comments about his peers. He would often ask about classmates that were missing from

the group and report whether he had seen them earlier in the day during his other classes. Mrs. Halo shared that Josh tended to serve as the peacemaker in the class, getting along well with everyone and not ever being someone who caused conflict.

Josh seems to understand that reading skills are not fixed and with help and practice, people can become better readers. He reports that a reading teacher's job is "to help you get better at reading" and he believes that he should "be on the reading level of the grade that I'm in" (focus group, October 28, 2020). His beliefs that he can and should continue to get better at reading demonstrate that he doesn't see his reader identity can change, and he seems to realize that both he and his teachers have a role in that process.

Participants' Collective Beliefs About Reading

The first major research question that this study sought to answer is, *How do adolescent readers in a reading intervention program present themselves as readers?* In seeking to understand how students present themselves as readers and the factors that contribute to their identities, it became apparent that there are both individualized beliefs and experiences that have impacted how these students see themselves as readers, and there are collective beliefs about reading emerging from common experiences. There are three main factors that all participants described as important aspects of reading. These are: Reading Choice and Interest, Vocabulary and Language, and Personal and Social Experiences with Reading. These ideas are foundational to understanding these students as readers. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the major factors that impact students' reader identities. The impact of those factors is closely connected to the beliefs that students hold about reading. Those beliefs will be explained in more detail in this section.

Reading Choice/Interest Matter

Embedded in the discussion about reading choice and the impact that choice has on reading interest, students openly shared what they enjoy reading, explored where and when they have been afforded choice opportunities in school, and discussed the connections between reading interest and reading levels.

Allowing students choice in what they read and for what purpose they read heavily influences their view of reading and themselves as readers as well as their engagement in the process. In almost every conversation that I had with students (focus group, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020; interview, November 18, 2020; and Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020), choice was mentioned and indicated as a factor in their reading ability and interest or enjoyment of reading. They also reported being more engaged in reading when they read books where the characters or situations represented people or things they know. When discussing why she enjoys her Literacy Lab class, Michelle shared that, “One of the main reasons I do like reading is because I get to read my own books.” (interview, November 4, 2020).

Erin: Okay. So, in Literacy Lab class, do you all choose what you want to read? (all say, yes) Did you choose what you wanted to read during book club in elementary school?

Michelle: No

Erin: No?

Davante: I mean, sometimes

Erin: What are some of the times that you get to read what you want to?

Michelle: I mean, like when I'm reading something on my phone, I'll probably read then. Like text messages or captions. Pictures.

Josh: Like if you're in school, a teacher will tell you, you have to read this and you have to learn what it's about and what's the main passage, but outside of schools, you're at home. You could do whatever you want, you could read whatever time you want you to stop whatever time you want.

Erin: So you feel connected to the books that you choose to read?

Michelle: Yeah. Because, like you love your family and you would do anything for them and take care of your siblings, because I have my brother he has like, allergies and asthma. And he has he's been doing a lot of coughing and he's allergic to like grass and dust and roaches and dogs. So that's why we have to like, take care of him. Me, my mom and dad, my mom's boyfriend. And in the book I read, the character-she had to do the same thing.

Similarly, when answering the question, *Do you read difficult books? Why or why not?* Josh wrote that, "Some books are hard, but I read those books if I find them interesting". He went on to share that he likes books if he can, "get into them". (Reader Identity Survey, November 23, 2020). These responses demonstrate the role that choice and interest have played in students' views of themselves as readers. They are willing to take on a challenge or engage in reading when they have choice. Davante, who repeatedly in discussions and interviews, shared that he is not a good reader also sees choice as contributing to his identity as a reader. When asked, *Are you a good reader? Explain your thinking*, Davante wrote, "No, but yeah when it's something I wanna read". His

response demonstrates the confidence that reading interests have played in Davante's perceptions of his reading ability.

Students were clear about their reading interests. Each of them was able to easily identify the genre, type, or at least a title of a book or books that they enjoy. When asked *If you could pick what you want to read, what would you pick?* Michelle explained that she enjoys graphic novels, nonfiction, and fiction books (focus group, October 14, 2020). Josh shared that he will always choose books about sports, and Davante told us that he would read about dirt bikes and how to rebuild them (focus group, October 14, 2020). He told us that sometimes those directions are hard to understand, but when he has trouble reading one of those books, "I try different things on the actual dirt bike and then I figure it out" (focus group, October 14, 2020). This self-proclaimed non-reader who isn't good at it, did not hesitate to describe the role that authentic reading tasks have played in his life. Unlike Michelle and Josh, Davante wasn't able to share times where choice and interest played a role in his school reading, but his example of reading manuals to learn how to repair his dirt bike shows that he is a reader whether he sees himself as one or not. When first asked what he would choose to read if he had a choice, Davante's response was, "Pick what I'm reading?" (focus group, October 14, 2020). It was evident from this reaction that he isn't used to having much choice in school.

As we talked about choice and interest, it appeared that the students' opportunities for choice were inconsistent throughout their school experiences. When describing the similarities and differences between reading at school and reading at home, Michelle shared the following, "Like if you're in school, a teacher will tell you that you have to read this and you have to learn what it's about and what's the main passage. But outside

of schools, you're at home. You could do whatever you want. You could read whatever time you want you to stop whatever time you want. If you're a school, there's a certain time how long you have to read.” (focus group, October 14, 2020). Both Davante’s and Michelle’s responses imply that choice in reading is not a common experience for them. As I probed further into this idea of reading choice in school, it became apparent that choice wasn’t solely about interest but also a factor in students’ reader identity.

Josh was adamant that the books he often has to read in school are “boring” (focus group, October 14, 2020). He was then asked to describe what makes the books boring. He responded by saying, “Boring for me is like when somebody is trying to make you read even though you don’t understand.” (focus group, October 14, 2020). This response was very telling in terms of how Josh sees himself as a reader and led me to ask all of the students, *When you read things that you like to read do you think it’s easy or hard?* All of the students responded by saying that reading what they like is easier (focus group, October 14, 2020). This answer was not a surprise. There are many factors that might impact this belief: students choosing easier texts; students choosing texts for which they have a wealth of background knowledge; or students choosing texts that they are familiar with and context for. The most informative aspect of this discussion came when reading level and choice were discussed.

Students were asked, *Does the grade level/reading level of a text that you choose to read matter?* Josh quickly responded by saying, “no”, and Davante followed by adding, “Same thing that Josh said. If you read something that you want to read, the level doesn’t matter.” Similarly, Michelle also explained that, “The grade level of a book doesn’t matter when you read a book that you are interested in.” (focus group, October

14, 2020). The students also agreed that they do not check the grade level or reading level of books that they choose to read at home. The consensus among the students was that the factor that matters most when choosing a book, is choosing something that you like to read. Davante explained that, “You can’t let nobody pick or choose what you want to read.” (focus group, October 14, 2020) This conversation highlighted the role that reading level of texts play in students’ view of choice and view of themselves as readers. When asked why they think that we focus on reading level at school, Josh responded that it must be to get you further in reading. This distinction was telling in terms of how students view their choice reading vs. school reading.

Somewhere along their school journeys, an idea was formed that choice reading is fun and school reading is to get better at reading. For those students who feel success only when reading choice text and see school reading as too difficult or boring, this distinction can have implications for reader identity that are lasting beyond students’ time in school. The students were clear that they feel more successful, more confident, and more engaged when choice is afforded to them. Additionally, they worry less about reading level and are more likely to engage in reading more often leading to greater gains in skill and confidence. However, students were also clear that reading choice has not been a regular part of their experience in school. They cited occasional opportunities to choose or read what is of interest to them. They also cited the reading that is often given to them in school is boring. It could be argued that lack of choice and the lack of consideration for students’ interest in reading topics is one of the factors that has served to position them as struggling readers. When the reading opportunities that students are

given do not align with their personal experiences, cultural background, or knowledge, we put them at a significant disadvantage in terms of finding success as readers.

Vocabulary Knowledge and Language Acquisition.

Another aspect of reading that students described as a factor contributing to their reader identity was the knowledge of words and ability to comprehend the vocabulary in texts that they read. There was a strong belief among the students that reading is very much about being able to pronounce words and knowing what words mean. Davante told me during our one-on-one interview that, “Reading is about words. I don’t know a lot of words. Sometimes I’d be struggling on them words.” (interview, November 4, 2020). Similarly, when asked in his Reader Identity Survey about a time he helped someone else to read, Josh wrote, “I just helped them say the words.” In Michelle’s Reader Identity Survey, she wrote that the reason people read difficult books is, “To find new words and learn what they mean.” These beliefs about language and vocabulary are one thing that all three students agreed was a factor in making reading easy or difficult for them (focus group, October 14, 2020; October 21, 2020). This focus on vocabulary was not one that I had intended to explore or one that I had written interview questions around. However, as I collected and analyzed data, it became clear that it was something that needed to be addressed. About half way through the data collection process, I took time during one of our whole group discussions (focus group, October 21, 2020) to dig deeper into students’ beliefs about reading and vocabulary and how this impacts their identities as readers.

Erin: Is there anything about reading that is frustrating?

Davante: I don't know the words.

Erin: You don't always know all the words?

Davante: Yeah (others nod heads)

Josh: Like it can be hard...like the words sometimes.

Michelle: It would be hard because I would have to stop every single second and ask for somebody to help us with this word.

Erin: So earlier you told me that most of the books you wanted to read were too difficult for you when you were younger. Do you feel the same way now?

Josh: Ummm...Not really. I mean I get like choked up for some words but not all of them. Some of the words that I don't understand. And it's like that when you read, sometimes you don't understand what you're reading. And it's just confusing sometimes.

It became clear that students' confidence in themselves as readers has a lot to do with their knowledge of words, ability to correctly pronounce words, and their understanding of words in context. This led me to wonder how the students feel that teachers, and in particular reading teachers, can help support this aspect of reading. As a follow up to the previous week's conversation, on October 28, 2020, the following conversation took place.

Erin: What do you do when your teacher asks you to read something and you don't understand it?

Davante: Let's just leave that where it's at...

Mrs. Halo: You don't want to talk about that, Davante?

Davante: I'm turning my camera off.

Michelle: Ask the teacher if the words are confusing or if we are not understanding what the story means.

Erin: What can a teacher do to be helpful if you don't understand?

Josh: Help me understand what the word means or give me an example or put it in another way that makes sense.

Michelle: If I'm stuck on a word, give me some definitions.

Erin: Would it help if they gave you examples of how to use the word or synonyms of the word?

Michelle: Yeah examples help. In an example because I would still want to figure it out but not like to where I figure it out by you just telling me.

I found this conversation to be eye-opening in terms of students' beliefs about themselves as readers. Somewhere during their school years, they have learned that reading is about words. Words are an important part of reading for them, and it's the part of reading that makes it either easy or difficult. However, I suspect that their experiences with how to navigate vocabulary as readers has been different. Josh's response implies that he believes that he should ask for help if he doesn't know what a word means, but his experience with that help seems to be tied to just being told what the word means.

Michelle's experiences may have been more focused on how to use strategies to figure out a word's meaning. She is clear that she doesn't just want to be told the meaning, but wants help to figure out how to determine the meaning. I wasn't able to really get enough clarity from the students to say for sure if these differences are instruction-based or personality-based.

Very different from Josh and Michelle's responses was Davante's reaction to the question about what he does when he's given something to read that he doesn't understand. He did not want to discuss that question and chose to disengage completely from the conversation. Throughout my time working with these students, Davante was the one who showed the most reluctance, and I took his discomfort as an important part of his reader identity. I know that Davante sees words as an important part of reading. He told me that on more than one occasion, but it also seems that he doesn't feel confident in how to overcome that barrier. Even with all of the reading support that he has had, he either doesn't know or doesn't want to articulate what he knows about vocabulary strategies or why words make reading difficult for him.

Knowing that language and reading are closely related, I asked the students about how they think people learn to talk and how they think people learn to read. The students were clear in their beliefs that it's easy to learn to talk and that language acquisition is a natural process. They described learning to talk as something you naturally do by watching and listening to others. In contrast, they described reading as something that has to be taught. They shared that they learn words from their parents and friends and from social media and YouTube. They see language as both an important social tool and something they need to know for school. However, they see the two as separate systems that rarely cross over. The language systems that they use socially are different from the language systems they use in school or that they find in books. In rare cases when they read books that they see as representing their lives, then there are examples of social language in text. This evidence of literacy as a social practice made it even more clear

that the disconnect between students' social language system and the language system used at school. This is another factor contributing to their position as struggling readers.

Despite the fact that students see language acquisition as natural, they also seem to believe that there is a correct way to speak and an incorrect way to speak. When asked about learning to talk (focus group, October 29, 2020), Michelle commented, "Yeah, Except I don't know how to talk good." When Mrs. Halo responded by telling her that isn't true, she said, "I do not. When I say something, it will come out the wrong way and my mom, my grandmother or grandfather, or my dad will have to help me out." Through further probing, we uncovered that she sees proper grammar as important and when she doesn't know how to use proper grammar, she sees that as incorrect. Michelle had a very clear idea in her mind of what correct speaking is and what incorrect speaking is. She believes that the way that people speak in school is correct and the way that she often speaks at home is not. She also knows that it's important to her family that she speaks "correctly" which is why they correct her. Ultimately, Michelle has learned to code switch and use what she deems the right way to speak at school, but I have to wonder about the implications for her as a reader. Michelle doesn't seem to recognize that her language use may have or may be a factor contributing to her position as a struggling reader, but the disconnect between her experiences with language at home and language at school have most certainly contributed to her position in school.

While each student has their own unique perspective on how language and vocabulary have impacted them as readers, they all agree that these are very important factors in making someone a good reader. Seeking to understand why vocabulary is important and the role that language plays in reading, another important concept

emerged. The notion that reading is connected to personal experiences and based on students' background knowledge is another factor that all of the students described.

Reading is Personally and Socially Constructed

Through our discussions, Michelle, Davante, and Josh shared stories with me about reading with family members, books they enjoyed as young children, and what reading was like for them in elementary school. They also shared ways that they like to read outside of school. They spoke a great deal about social media as a way that they read outside of school.

It was clear from my conversations with these students and from observing them that reading is both personal and social. Children do not learn to read simply by sounding out letters and putting sounds together to make words. That is nothing more than word calling. Reading is about meaning-making and the meaning we make depends on our experiences. Children's exposure to print sources and the people who introduce books to them are a huge part of how they identify as readers.

Michelle was eager to share her personal and social experiences with reading. She shared a story with me about a time that she taught a younger child how to read (interview, November 4, 2020).

Michelle: Well, I think like your parents just teaching you how to read because I know one time when I was in this after school or something, this little girl came to me. And then she came up to me, and she had a book in her hand, and I was like, You can't read? She said, No. I was like did your mom ever teach you? And she was like, no. So I helped her to read a little.

Erin: So, I'm curious. How did you teach her to read? Like, what did you do?

Michelle: I just read to her. She didn't know some words, so she was reading by herself. And if she didn't know some of the words, I like helped her out a little bit. Yeah, she didn't know how to read, so I helped her a little bit just to see.

Michelle's question to the young girl about whether her mom ever taught her to read says a lot about her beliefs about reading. Michelle grew up with parents, aunts, and other adults who read to her a lot. Her experiences instilled a belief that reading starts at home. Additionally, her confidence in being able to teach a younger child how to read showed not only agency as a reader, but a belief that reading is something we all can do with a little help. Michelle's attitude toward reading and view of herself as a reader was not an isolated case. All three students articulated at least one experience with reading outside of the classroom that has impacted their reader identities.

Josh also shared experiences with reading in personal and social ways. His explanations about how he uses reading outside of school demonstrated that his reader identity isn't only informed by his school experiences but also by his world outside of school (focus group, October 14, 2020).

Erin: Do you think that reading is something that can be taught?

Josh: Yeah. It's a process and it takes time.

Erin: Do you think when you read you have to come up with any of your own thoughts?

Josh: Yeah, yeah. I say, Yeah. Cuz like you said, you gotta see the pictures in your head. And like, not everything that they're saying, it's going to come to my head because that's their thinking. So, it's going to be my thinking and is going to be creative and different.

Erin: So what types of things do you read outside of school?

Josh: Stuff on my game and plays. Like for football

Erin: Oh, you read football plays. Okay. And are those written with words are they more written with diagrams?

Josh: Diagrams

Erin: Do you still think that's reading?

Josh: Kinda cuz it's pictures and pictures that make you understand stuff, like a fiction book. Like, um observing what is happening in the picture and like what are they doing and how is this making all of this make sense.

Josh recognizes that reading takes on many different forms, and he knows that reading is a meaning-making process. He also recognizes that it's his experiences and schema that help to make meaning as he reads. He doesn't know this because someone has told him or because he's studied the reading process. He knows it because, even though he's been labeled as a struggling reader, he is a critical thinker who reads for a purpose.

During our first group interview, we focused on just getting to know each other and talking about reading in a very general sense. We asked the students about things that they like to read and what they can remember about reading when they were younger. Maybelle made the following observation as she listened to the students talk

about books they enjoy, “I’m having an observation that this (points at the computer) can’t capture, but when you guys are talking about these stories your smiles are so big.” (focus group, October 7, 2020). When asked about reading at home, Michelle was again eager to share stories, but Josh and Davante were less participatory. While both of them had stories of reading in school at a young age, they did not seem to recall as much about reading at home (focus group, October 14, 2020).

Erin: Okay, so she was teaching you how to use some of those features of the book to help it make sense. What about at home? Did you read it at home when you were in elementary school or younger than that?

Josh: Sometimes.

Michelle: In my house we have this room. This is like an extra room but my mom used to have like, bookshelf in it. She has a lot of books on it, but she used it for that.

Erin: Do you have any memories or can you remember being young and having anyone read to you?

Josh and Michelle: (nod) Yes.

Erin: Okay, so tell me about that a little bit.

Michelle: My Sister um, my older sister, she would come in my room and read us this book. I think it was called... I forgot what it was called. Yeah. She would read...I think the book was called, Chick-a-chick-a-boom-boom? And then she would read that book and then the book about the caterpillar.

Erin: Doty: Very Hungry Caterpillar?

Michelle: Yeah.

Erin: Davante, do you remember anything like that?

Davante: No. I only remember reading in school.

Erin: Did your teachers read to you?

Davante: Yeah

The personal stories that these students shared about reading shed some light on how social and personal experiences have helped to form their reader identities. Of all the students, Michelle is the one with the most stories about reading to share and it appears the most diverse experiences with reading both in and out of school. She's the most confident reader of the group and the one who seems to be the surest in her beliefs about what reading is and her ability to improve as a reader. Josh and Davante were less open about sharing experiences with reading outside of school. I am unsure if that is because they lack those experiences or because they just did not want to talk about it. Josh said that he remembers reading at home when he was younger and that people did read to him, but he did not elaborate any further. He is also a reader who describes himself as okay and is sometimes able to express confidence in himself as a reader and sometimes not. Davante said that he does not remember reading at home. He is the least confident when it comes to reading of the three, and was the least uncomfortable when it came to talking about the act of reading. Considering these data, it would seem that for these students, their reader identities began being formed at a young age. It would also appear that the identities they hold today were formed through a combination of experiences that are academic as well as personal and social.

While these students do not meet the literacy expectations that school requires of them, they are skillful and bright. They listen to various kinds of music, and they read and write song and rap lyrics in their free time. They watch videos on YouTube and send messages to each other through video games. They communicate through social media, video chats, and spend hours texting one another. They express themselves through “tweets” and “snaps” using images and words to explain how they feel. They may not all be inclined to pick up a novel and read it cover to cover, but they will read web pages that teach them how to play video games and search for interesting facts about famous people they admire on the internet. I have come to understand that the literacy experiences we provide in school are often not designed for these students whose out of school literacy learning is much more varied and diverse. The narrow definition of literacy that tends to be used in schools as well as the lack of consideration of how important the social and personal aspects of reading are is another way that these students have been positioned as struggling.

Factors that Influence Reader Identity

After gaining a clear picture of how these students see themselves as readers as well as their beliefs about what aspects of reading are important, the second major research question that this study sought to answer is, *What do these students see as the major impacts on their reader identities?* Through group discussions, personal interviews, and students’ responses and surveys, three main factors emerged from the data as having the most impact on these students’ reader identities. Those factors are: Teacher/Student relationships, students’ behavior, and school structures. Each of these will be fleshed out in this section.

Teacher Support

Throughout the data collection process, no matter what question I asked the students or what direction I tried to steer the conversation, conversation always returned to their teachers. It was clear from our discussions that the relationships students form with their teachers are a crucial aspect of their school experience. These students named several things that teachers do that contribute to these relationships and make students feel supported. Students cited teachers who are approachable, who listen, who care about them on a personal level, and who provide guidance as the type of teachers who are most supportive. The idea of trust was also central to every aspect of teacher support that was discussed, and the students had some very clear ideas about how teachers can earn students' trust, the importance of trust, and the impact that trust has on motivation and reading. First and foremost, they shared with me that how teachers approach students really matters (focus group, October 21, 2020).

Erin: Why is it that you guys trust some teachers more than others?

Davante: It's the way the teacher acts. It's like how a first impression show off, so I can see if they're cool and all. When I first went to Mrs. Halo's class, she was cool. I like the way she teaches. I like how the teachers start off. If you start out mean, I'm not going to like you.

Josh: As a teacher, if you're nice to the student, they actually want to learn, but if you're mean, then they won't want to learn. My science teacher is nice. She start off nice. I like her on the first day. I knew that she would be a good teacher.

Josh's and Davante's explanation of the way that teachers "start off" was a factor that continued to weave its way through conversations. First impressions hold a lot of weight for both of them. Beyond how a teacher acts on the first day, the students explained how they know that a teacher is going to be good (focus group, October 21, 2020).

Michelle: It just depends on how they act. If they say who they really are, then I know that they will be a good teacher. Also, if they are calm and respectful and don't talk too much.

Davante: Yeah. They can't be running up like that. My ELA teacher, she just keep talking and talking and talking.

Josh: They like have a good tone then that's how you can tell that they're going to be a good teacher

Michelle's comments about teacher authenticity and all three of the students' comments about the amount of teacher talk led to the discussion of a particular teacher who all three students share. They explained the ways that this teacher approaches students and instruction that make it difficult for them to learn. Michelle explained that this teacher is "ok" but "she isn't organized" and "needs to post things at one time" (focus group, October 21, 2020). Davante commented that, "When she gets aggravated with us, she just needs to get us out of her class." (focus group, October 21, 2020). The students shared that one of the reasons they believe that this teacher and other teachers get frustrated is because students talk while the teachers are talking. They explained that their frustration as students is that they are not given a chance to talk during class and are told to be quiet and listen most of the time (focus group, October 21, 2020).

Davante: I feel like she doesn't let us get no work done. She just talks the whole time.

Josh: I never get to say anything in her class.

Mrs. Halo: I think a lot of teachers just think that they need to talk to teach you.

Josh: It feels like pressure.

Josh's perspective that too much teacher talk feels like pressure was very telling. These students were clear in their perspectives that teachers who are nice make you want to learn and teachers who listen are seen as the ones who are nice. I asked the students to describe characteristics other than listening to students that make a teacher nice. Josh explained, "Well, it is like she helps you and she doesn't do all that boring stuff." (focus group, October 21, 2020). The concept of teacher support and help was another aspect of teacher/student relationship that recurred throughout our conversations. Even though these students often behave as though they do not want or need help, their true feelings are much different (focus group, October 21, 2020).

Erin: What would you do if you didn't understand something in Literacy Lab?

Michelle: I would ask for help. I would tell Mrs. Halo that I need help to understand it better.

Erin: What would you do if you needed help in your English Language Arts class?

Michelle: I would just try to figure it out.

Erin: Why is that?

Michelle: Because my teacher wouldn't help me.

Erin: What would she do?

Michelle: She would tell me to figure it out myself.

Erin: How do you feel about that?

Michelle: Yeah sometimes I feel uncomfortable with a that because like if I don't understand something see like this is what I'm trying to say, the teacher always want us to come to them when we need help when we're working on an assignment and we ask for help and they tell us to figure it out ourselves.

Similarly, to Michelle, Davante commented that he wouldn't ask his English teacher for help because she, "isn't going to give me the type of answer that you [Mrs. Halo] will give me." (focus group, October 21, 2020). What is implied but not specifically said and maybe even not fully realized by these students is that the relationship between Mrs. Halo and this group of students has far more to do with their comfort level in asking questions than exactly what she says or what another teacher might say. They have come to realize that she cares about them, and her classroom is a safe space for them to make mistakes and learn from them. It is clear that a huge part of the way that these students see themselves as readers and as students is connected to the relationships that they have with their teachers and the ways that their teachers see and position them as learners. An important aspect of the teacher/student relationship that arose during our conversations was how teachers react or respond to behavior and how that response can impact a student's academic performance.

Students' Behavior

The connections between student behavior and academic success became an important topic of conversation during our meetings. Throughout our discussions, the idea of student behavior continued to arise. Michelle, Davante, and Josh all cited times that behavior and learning coincided. They were each able to share at least one story of a time when their behavior did not meet expectations set forth by their school and teacher as well as the impact that those experiences had on them as learners. I do not think that anyone who has spent time in a classroom or school would be surprised to know that there is a distinct connection between these two aspects of classroom practice. What tends to be less definitive, however, is the role that teachers' and schools' responses to student behavior impacts learning and achievement.

How to best respond to students when they do not meet expectations or address continued misbehavior in a school or classroom can be controversial topics and are issues of continued discussion in many schools. At Global Middle School, teachers were beginning to explore ways to reteach behavior expectations when students did not meet them as an alternative to traditional approaches to behavior management such as removing students from the classroom. However, it is evident from discussion with these students that they have also experienced much more punitive behavior responses during their time in school. This is where the tension lies in the connections between behavior and learning for these students, and where we see an impact on their position in school and identity as learners. Conversations about behavior often arose while we were talking about other aspects of school.

While discussing standardized assessments and their role in reading during our October 28th meeting, Davante told us that he doesn't care about test scores and doesn't care about how he does on assessments. When asked *when did you stop caring*, he responded, "The first day that I went to ISS in elementary school". Davante was promoted for more information and the following exchange occurred:

Erin: Why do you think that you had to go to Book Club in elementary school?

Davante: Cause I was slow

Erin: What do you mean by that?

Davante: I was in dumb in elementary.

Erin: You were dumb?

Davante: Yeah.

Erin: Why do you think that you were dumb?

Davante: Getting in trouble every day.

Mrs. Halo: Well, that's behavior and didn't have anything to do with your intelligence.

Davante: Yeah.

Erin: Yeah, you think it does or Yeah, you think it doesn't?

Davante: It does.

Mrs. Halo: Say more about that?

Davante: Every time I did something dumb, I would be in the front office.

I went on a daily basis.

Erin: Talk about how going to the office has something to do with how well you do academically.

Davante: Because I always think about me going to the office and what my consequence would be.

Erin: So that's what you were focusing on during class?

Davante: Yeah.

Erin: Did you miss a lot of instruction because you were in the office?

Davante: Yeah.

Erin: Do you think that had any impact on what you learned?

Davante: Yeah.

Erin: How so?

Davante: Cause I was either in ISS or I was in the office about to get called home.

Erin: So you missed a lot of stuff?

Davante: Yeah.

Erin: So do you think that's why you had to go to Book Club?

Davante: No, the reason that I had to go to Book Club was because I didn't know how to read.

Mrs. Halo: How many days out of 10 would you say that you had to spend time in the office?

Davante: Ten out of ten.

Davante's conversation with us about his behavior paints a picture of a little boy whose behavior most definitely had an impact on his learning. It's clear from Davante's

responses that his misbehavior in elementary school caused him to miss a great deal of instructional time which could certainly have been one factor in his need for additional reading support. Davante doesn't completely see that connection; in his mind, he wasn't smart enough to do well in school. Later in the discussion, we asked Davante, *Do you believe that your behavior problems caused your reading problems or did your reading problems cause your behavior problems?* He responded by saying, "My behavior problems caused my reading problems." (focus group, October 28, 2020). It's hard to know from our conversations alone if his misbehavior was a response to struggling with reading at a young age or if his misbehavior was a partial cause of his struggle. Either way, there is a clear connection between the two, and the response to his misbehavior was even more crucial. Being sent to ISS or to the office so frequently was a major factor that contributed to his being positioned as struggling academically and probably positioned negatively in terms of compliance and ability to assimilate to school. There is no doubt that these experiences contributed to his reader identity.

Similarly, both Josh and Michelle shared experiences with behavior issues in school. Michelle shared a story about time in 6th grade when she got a referral for hitting another student. In her description of the incident, she described feeling some unfair treatment involved in the way that the situation was handled by the teacher (focus group, October 21, 2020). In the same conversation Josh told us that, "I remember that I got a write up in 5th grade because I fought with someone. In 6th grade I almost got expelled." (focus group, October 21, 2020). In response to hearing students' experiences with behavior, we dug a little deeper in trying to understand their perspectives regarding behavior and academic performance.

Erin: Do you think that there is a connection between behavior and academics?

Josh: It could be. You know there's like some annoying teachers and some nice teachers who can just sit with and talk to them. But some teachers, you can't sit with and talk to them, they'll just give you a referral and tell you to get out.

Michelle: Yeah when your classes have a lot of behavior problems.

Erin: So, do all teachers respond to students when they are mad or misbehave in the same ways?

Michelle: So, the teachers can be like, oh, do you want to talk about it? Let's go into this room privately, and we're going to have a one-on-one conversation. I can try to calm you down. And then the other teachers would be like, you could go to the front office or you could go to the classroom office and just suck it up, because I'm not going to deal with this today.

Erin: So how are reading and behavior connected?

Josh: If you don't behave, you can't get your work done and you're off task.

Michelle: It affects that because if you're mad about something and you take it out on other people, it can affect how you act and change. It might not make you want to read or do everything else in life.

The students do seem to know that there is a connection between their learning and their behavior, and they also seem to understand that how teachers respond to their

behavior is also a factor. However, they are also honest enough to see how their own actions and choices are equally important. Davante showed that he recognizes the impact of his choices when he told us that, “I can be smart when I choose to be, but you’ve got to be able to read to be smart.” (focus group, October 28, 2020). Similarly, Josh shared with us that he believes his behavior has changed over the last few years and as a result, he feels more confident and does better in school. He explained:

Yeah, actually, when I used to get frustrated all the time, like elementary school, I was so angry at people because they kept messing with me. And fifth grade I kinda fought this kid who kind of kept bothering me. I won, of course. I actually did. And I, I, I could say I changed. I think I do have to work on my temper a little bit, but I think I’ve changed. (focus group, October 28, 2020).

All three of these students were very honest and open in sharing their experiences with behavior in school. They do understand that behavior and learning are connected, but I am not clear if they really understand how crucial that connection is or how much behavior management approaches at the classroom and school level may have impacted or may continue to impact their trajectory in school. From an adult perspective, it’s clear that students’ academic position in school is often impacted by the way their behaviors are interpreted and addressed. How teachers respond to students’ behavior can have a very important and lasting impact on their academic opportunities and therefore, their identity as a reader.

School Structures

As I outlined earlier in this chapter, the students were clear that reading choice and personal experiences are an important part of their collective beliefs about reading. In

stark contrast to those beliefs, the experiences with reading in school that they describe have been quite different. It could be argued that the disconnect between their beliefs and experiences is one factor that impacts their reader identity.

Similarly, to the way that behavior impacts a student's academic position in school, there are often structures in place that also contribute to their standing. Factors such as standardized reading assessments and leveling or tracking of students into different courses are two aspects of school structures that were uncovered during our discussions. These structures seem to have important implications for students' view of themselves as readers and learners.

Assessments. One of the first areas of reading and learning that we dug into was testing. Testing was an important topic that I set out to investigate, yet before even delving into my interview questions on this topic, it arose organically. Testing came up in several conversations and was an ongoing aspect of many things we discussed. Students know that testing is one part of school that is designed to define their identity as a reader. They have been conditioned to see it as a crucial factor in their success in school.

Erin: How do you feel when you take standardized tests?

Davante: I don't care about them.

Josh: I feel kinda good because I'm not sure if I'm going to pass or not, so I'm unsure.

Michelle: Sometimes I care a little and sometimes I care a lot.

Davante: The reason that I said that I don't care is that there is always something wrong with what I do

Erin: What do you think those tests have to do with reading?

Davante: See what type of reading level you are. I've always been on a low reading level. For some reason I've never been on the reading level for the grade that I am in. Even in elementary I've always been on the lower level. I was in the 6th grade and I was on a 2nd grade reading level.

Erin: How do you know what reading level you are on?

Davante: I saw my teacher's paper one time.

Josh: I don't even know what reading level I'm on anymore. I used to be on a low one. I think that I should be on the reading level of the grade that I'm in.

The students' responses demonstrate the impact that standardized testing has on their beliefs about their reading ability. All three of them expressed some amount of apprehension when it comes to these assessments and what they mean for them as students. They described concern about how well they will perform and what their performance means. It appears that most of what they believe about these assessments centers around them being used to identify how well they read or in most cases to identify them as not reading well enough. The students hold a belief that there is a right or wrong when it comes to reading; a way to understand something correctly and a way to misunderstand it. It would appear that this belief stems from their experiences with the standardized testing of their reading ability.

Michelle, Davante, and Josh began taking reading assessments in elementary school. In their school district, students take the MAP reading assessment three times a year beginning in the second grade and take the state's standardized assessments in reading and math third beginning in second grade. They are assessed in this fashion every

year through grade eight. The results of these assessments are used to place students in varying levels of classes such as the Academically Gifted Program (AGP) in elementary school and honors level classes in middle school. These assessments are also a big part of the identification process for reading intervention at all grade levels. It would be safe to assume that their experiences with frequent reading assessments and the use of these assessments in school have impacted how they view reading and their role in the reading process.

During our October 14th focus group discussion, we talked about the ways that students experience reading in their classrooms. Their responses were telling in terms of the impact that assessments have had on their beliefs.

Erin: When you are asked a question about a story or text that you are reading, do you think that there is one correct answer?

Michelle: Sometimes I feel that way.

Davante: Yeah. I do.

Josh: Yeah.

Erin: Do you think that teachers are looking for one right answer?

Michelle: It's like a weird feeling because you may have one answer that you want to choose or you think is right, but they want the right answer. It makes me feel like maybe I don't know what I'm doing.

Josh: It depends.

Erin: So, if you all got different answers to a question about something that you were reading, could you all be correct?

Michelle: Yeah. Maybe. The teacher might say that there are multiple answers but it depends on the story that the teacher gives you.

Davante: I wouldn't think that we would all be right because there's probably one right answer that's right from my experience.

Josh: One of us would be.

It could be argued that this belief that all readers should experience a text in the same way is rooted in students' experiences with standardized assessments. Michelle's explanation that sometimes there is more than one right answer, and Josh's ambivalent belief that the right and wrong of reading may depend, demonstrates that they have had some exposure to the understanding of reading as a meaning-making process. It may also be evidence that these students have some understanding of the importance of their individual thoughts in terms of reading comprehension. However, there is a much more prevalent belief that teachers are looking for right answers about reading. As we explored this topic, students shared that most of their experiences with reading in their ELA classrooms have been centered around reading a short text and answering multiple choice questions, a format that mirrors what students experience on assessments.

Leveled Courses. The use of reading assessments to place students in AGP and honors courses as well as their use as an identification tool for reading intervention, separates students into different learning tracks. In many cases, as is true with my three participants, students are identified for a track in elementary school and remain on that track throughout their entire school experience. This division can have major implications for students' identity as both readers and students.

Erin: Do you have any kids in your classes who you think are good readers or like to read?

Michelle: (Shakes her head no)

Davante: Nope

Josh: No

Erin: Do you think all students have the same experiences in school?

Michelle: I would say that everybody has different experiences because everybody might not like class and there are other people who do. I've seen people on my Google Meets who like school. I really don't know them, but I've seen them. They're like, Oh, I like this. I like that, and they talk about assignments.

Erin: Do you think that all students are set up for success?

Michelle: Yes. Most teachers explain things in an easy way. I mean not all teachers do that. I have some teachers that do that, but not all teachers are nice and stuff.

Davante: Maybe

Josh: Maybe. Maybe not.

Erin: Can you say more about that?

Josh: Um..I really don't know how to explain it...I just really can't explain it.

It appeared from their responses that these students know (possibly on an unconscious level) that there are differences between leveled courses and the ways that students experience school. We probed further to gain an understanding of students'

perceptions of those students and courses that they do not typically experience. When asked, *How do you think honors classes are different from the regular classes when it comes to ELA?*, the response was silence and shrugging of shoulders from all participants. I tried a different approach:

Erin: Do you know anyone in honors classes?

Michelle: Yeah. I think one of my friends in my homeroom class is in honors classes.

Davante: No

Josh: Umm. I mean...maybe.

Erin: Why do you think that people in honors classes and people in regular classes don't really know each other?

Davante: I don't care about none of them.

Michelle: I wouldn't say that I don't care, but I just don't really know them.

Josh: I don't know them either.

Erin: Do you think the students in those classes think school is easy?

Michelle: So yeah because they like it, and it's exciting and sometimes it's hard to them but mostly they think that everything is easy and love reading and stuff.

Erin: So what do you think makes school easy for some students?

Davante: They pay attention. I don't pay attention in none of my classes because I don't care.

Josh: They do their work, and they are smart.

Erin: So, does paying attention and participating in class mean that someone is smart?

Michelle: I guess so, but I don't think that anyone in our class is stupid.

Davante: Yeah. In certain classes.

Josh: Yeah.

From their perspectives, there is a clear division between my participants and the students who they perceive as the smart students who like school. Michelle is doesn't see herself or her classmates in Literacy Lab as stupid, but she also knows that there is something different between them and those in honors classes who like school and talk about assignments. Davante and Josh are less optimistic. They know that there are differences and are resigned to things being this way. They do not see themselves as the same type of learner as those students in honors classes which is evidence that the structures of school have impacted their perceptions of smart and their ideas about themselves as readers. The more that I learned about these students and the better that I got to know them, I began to see that presenting themselves as not caring or acting as though being "good" at school doesn't matter is merely a defense mechanism of protection. No human being wants to feel like they are unsuccessful, and these students are no different. They do not want to be seen as poor students or struggling readers. They understand the ways that they have been positioned in school; the labels that they have; and the boundaries those labels create. They feel safe and even successful when they are together in their Literacy Lab class, but in the larger school community they have learned that their place is that of struggling reader and perhaps even struggling student.

The Impact of Reading Support

The last major research question that this study aimed to answer is, *How do students describe the reading support that they have received in reading intervention?*

This was a question that was answered throughout the data collection process. Embedded in all our conversations and woven into every aspect of this research were students' feelings and beliefs about the reading support they have received.

Elementary RTI Support.

All three of these participants received reading support in elementary school through what was termed “Book Clubs”. This term was used to describe pull out reading support provided by a reading interventionist. The amount of time that students spent in these book clubs seemed to vary from daily to weekly and somewhere in between. These students all attended a different elementary school in their current school district. While all elementary schools in this school district have similar RTI programs, there are variances by school depending on school staff, student population and other factors that make a school unique. From our conversations and these students' elementary school RTI support plans that I was able to review, I concluded that the main focus of book clubs for all students was increasing students' progress in two domains: Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension.

Michelle's records show one Tier I reading support plan and four Tier II reading support plans. The goal of her Tier I support plan was to, “Increase reading comprehension”. Specifics such as how, by when, or what measure was used are not specified in the plan. The goals listed on her Tier II plans specified particular increases in her accuracy with Oral Reading Fluency as well as particular increases in Reading

Comprehension of leveled reading texts. Both the baseline reading level as well as the goal level were specified in all of the plans as well as the frequency of progress monitoring. The plans did not specify the location of support, but based on conversations with Michelle, I believe these supports took place outside of the regular classroom.

Davante's records show six Tier II reading support plans. Each plan outlines a goal of increasing his Reading Comprehension with leveled texts. Like Michelle's plans, the baseline reading level and goal are outlined as is the frequency of progress monitoring. Again, the plan doesn't state the location of support, but Davante told me that he met with his book club teacher every day leading me to assume that the support was not in his homeroom classroom.

Lastly, Josh's records show three Tier I support plans and one Tier II support plan. The focus of both his Tier I and Tier II plans was increasing the understanding of word meanings and increasing his comprehension of leveled texts. Just like his classmates, the baseline reading level as well as the goal level were specified in all of the plans. The frequency of progress monitoring was not outlined nor was the location of support. Again, I assume this was pull-out support based on our conversations.

When speaking with students about their experiences with Book Clubs in elementary school, they did not have much to share. It's possible that the main reason for this is the amount of time that has passed since students were in elementary school. I learned from our conversations that they left their classrooms to go to Book Club and during that time they worked with a teacher who helped them with reading. From the students' perspectives, the purpose of Book Club was to make them better readers. Michelle shared, "Lit. Lab is like when you read books and try to understand what you

are reading about in the passage and the main idea. It's kind of the same thing as Book Club." (interview, November 18, 2020). Josh shared that, "When I was in fifth grade, I used to go to Book Club, and we were always reading books, and we would get snacks if we were doing a good job." (focus group, October 28, 2020). Davante explained to me that he went to his reading teacher every day to help him, "Read until I learn what's going on passage and then everything, all the details like what it's all about." (focus group, October 28, 2020). These explanations from the participants show that the students knew, even in elementary school, that Book Club was a form of reading support. What I found unclear from those responses, was how students viewed that support. In an attempt to gain some insight into their thinking about what they learned from Book Club, I asked students during our October 28th focus group session specifically about it. This conversation ensued:

Erin: You said Book Club was a small group of people. Was it a small group of people that stayed in your classroom or did you leave your classroom?

Michelle: We left the classroom.

Erin: Okay. You too?

Davante: (Nodded)

Josh: We went to another room with a small group.

Erin: Do you remember what the purpose was or why you went? Did you ever talk about that with your teacher?

Michelle: Yes, I went there so that I could be a better reader and learn not to go too fast when I was reading. And also, to figure out what's in this passage, and what's going on in the book.

Erin: Did you enjoy Book Club?

Josh: When I first started I didn't.

Michelle: I liked it after a while because I got to have the teachers with me by myself and not with the whole class.

Erin: Why do you think it took you a while to get used to Book Club and like it?

Josh: Because I never really liked reading. When I was little I never liked it. I never picked up a book and actually tried. I just never thought about liking it.

Erin: Did Book Club help you to like reading more?

Michelle: I kind of always liked reading, but Book Club made me read more quickly and that made me like reading more.

Davante: I don't really like reading either way.

Josh: Kind of. It made me read more, so I guess I liked it more then.

These responses demonstrated to me that students' overall recollection of Book Club was that the support was helpful. They remember attending regularly, they remember reading and working hard to get better at reading, and they feel that it had some impact on them. The small group or one-on-one aspect of the support also seemed to be something that stood out as meaningful. I would speculate that the time spent receiving more individualized support helped students to build relationships with their

reading teachers, and we already know the importance that these students place on student/teacher relationships. Davante told us that Mrs. Parks (pseudonym), his reading teacher, was nice and one of the only teachers that he liked in elementary school. The idea of student/teacher relationships was also an underlying component of everything that students described about Literacy Lab.

Middle Level Reading Intervention.

As mentioned previously, Literacy Lab is a course that students are assigned to during their middle school years. It meets daily and is one of the students' elective classes. Students were much more forthcoming with information about Literacy Lab than they had been when talking about Book Club. I believe the main reason for that is timing. These participants are currently enrolled in Literacy Lab, so it was much easier for them to describe its purpose and impact. There were two main ideas that emerged as students discussed the course. The first was how it helped them as readers, the second was the environment. We began with conversation October 28, 2020) about the similarities between Book Club and Literacy Lab.

Erin: Do you feel like Book Club is similar or different from Literacy Lab?

Josh: A little different, a little like the same.

Erin: How are they the same?

Davante: Cuz like you're reading books.

Michelle: To do the same thing. To be a good reader. And also just take your time to understand what you are reading.

Erin: That makes sense. How are they different then?

Michelle: Um. Like, you're actually thinking about what you're reading instead of like talking about the same book that everyone is reading and she's asking questions about like, what you're reading and how you're reading it.

Erin: Okay. So, in Mrs. Halo's class, you are choosing an independent book to read? (*all nodded, yes*) Did you choose what you wanted to read in Book Club?

Davante: No

Michelle: No. The teacher gave us a book.

Josh: We just read what the teacher gave us to read.

Erin: So, you never chose your own book?

Josh: I mean, sometimes

Erin Doty: Sometimes you did?

Michelle: Yeah. Like if it was a one-on-one reading, she would say you can read whatever we wanted to read. Like bring a book from class or from the library.

Students' responses uncovered one small difference between Book Club and Literacy Lab, and that is reading choice. As I explored earlier in this chapter, reading choice is an important factor in students' beliefs about reading, so this distinction is an important one for the students. Considering that the RTI support plans that I reviewed almost all described goals for reading that focused on increasing students' reading comprehension of leveled texts. This fact combined with students' memory of their Book Club teachers choosing their books for them, draws the conclusion that Literacy Lab

offers more choice and more opportunities for individualized support than Book Club did. With that in mind, we discussed how Literacy Lab is viewed in terms of support (interview, November 18, 2020).

Erin: What do you think the purpose of Mrs. Halo's job is?

Michelle: Teach us about how to be better readers.

Davante: So, you don't have things that you don't understand.

Josh: To help you get better at reading so you don't have things that you don't understand.

Erin: How does Literacy Lab help you to be a better reader?

Michelle: Mrs. Halo helps me to understand it better.

Davante: She always knows when I need help. She can just tell.

Josh: I don't really feel like I need help in that class. I just feel comfortable there.

Erin: Can you say more about why you feel comfortable in Literacy Lab?

Josh: All the students. I like the peers because they're nice and chill and the class just makes me feel like I fit in.

Erin: Do you not feel like you fit in in your other classes?

Josh: I mean. I do, some of the teachers can make me mad.

Davante: It's fun going to Mrs. Halo's class. It helps me get my work finished.

Once again, the central tenet of the support that students have described is teacher focused. What these students view as support is their teacher knowing them and making them feel like they belong. The support that students feel like they have received in

Literacy Lab goes far beyond reading instruction. Josh told me, “It really makes me happy if I’m in a bad mood. That class is just a good class for me. It’s not one of hyper classes, it’s just a chill class. I’m glad” (interview, November 18, 2020). Josh’s feelings about the environment that has been created in Literacy Lab is a crucial aspect of support. Davante explained it this way (interview, November 18, 2020):

Erin: If they told you tomorrow that you weren’t going to be in Literacy Lab anymore, what would your reaction be?

Davante: They can’t do me like that.

Maybelle: Why not?

Davante: Because I will be part of your class

Maybelle: Explain what you mean by that.

Davante: I probably wouldn’t be the same person if I didn’t have your class.

Maybelle: What kind of person would you be?

Davante: A bad person. I’d never go to class. Me going to your class, I feel I can make it through the day. When I get to my first three blocks and I go to Miss Halo’s class, I know I can make it through the rest of the day.

Davante’s description of the impact that Mrs. Halo’s has had on him also goes far beyond reading. Feeling connected to Mrs. Halo and feeling comfortable in the learning space that she created has given Davante what he needs to simply be a student. Both the teacher and the space of Literacy Lab impact these students’ identities as readers.

When I analyzed the general idea of reading support from the students’ perspective, my overall conclusion was that these students do see the support they have

received as having a positive impact. However, it's not as simple as was it helpful or not or are they strong readers now; the ways that students perceived the support is far more crucial. There is certainly data in their elementary RTI plans to show that each of these students improved their reading comprehension in the way that the plans intended for them to, and there is some reading MAP data from their middle school years to show an increase in students percentile ranking on the reading assessment and an increase in the students' Lexile level. However, these are not reliable sources to show improvement in reading, and the growth has not yet been significant enough for students to no longer be placed in reading intervention. That is one of the main reasons that it is students' perceptions of this support that this study is seeking to understand. It was clear to me in working with these students this semester that while their participation in reading intervention over the years has not yielded expected results on standardized assessments, there has been an impact that cannot be measured by standardized tests. I would argue that these three students are more confident as readers and able to speak articulately about who they are as readers and their purpose for reading because of their experience with reading intervention.

The Literacy Lab class became a safe space and important community for these students. The support from Mrs. Halo and time and space to feel connected to each other and their learning proved to be important aspects of the reading support these students received. However, there are also aspects of this programming that have had negative effects on these students. The organization of reading support both in elementary and middle school has caused a clear separation between these readers and their classmates who have been deemed more proficient with reading. Beginning in elementary school

and continuing through eighth grades, these students have been separated to receive support either by being removed from their regular schedule to attend Book Club or through the loss of an elective class in middle school to be placed in Literacy Lab. Additionally, being separated from peers labeled as Gifted or attending honors classes to the degree that they do know or see those students is a structure that causes division and positioning. The structuring of reading support in this way is yet another factor contributing to students being positioned as struggling readers by their teachers and schools.

Conclusion

These students' stories provided valuable information and perspective that does not typically exist in the research regarding reading interventions and support. One major objective of this study is to understand how students being served in reading intervention during their middle school years view themselves as readers. What I learned from the students is that the term struggling reader is one imposed upon them by adults; it is not necessarily one that they identify with. They have certainly had misgivings about their reading abilities at times, but their confidence levels as readers are individualized. Michelle identifies as a pretty confident reader while Josh sees his skills as a reader as okay, but he also knows that he has potential to be a strong reader. Davante claims to be a poor reader, but he also knows that there are a lot of factors contributing to his placement in the educational setting. They all believe strongly that their teachers matter and are an important part of their success.

There is a great need for the reading community to learn from the students themselves and to try to understand how our interventions, supports, and well-intentioned

tracking has affected them. We need to find out from the students if the supports are useful and if the supports are necessary, and we need to understand all of this at the individual level. We are continuing to apply mass support to all students who look the same on paper, but who are very different individuals. The findings of this study clearly identified teacher influence as the most crucial aspect of students' success in reading. The importance of that influence ranges from their ability to understand readers' needs and address them through instruction to being able to connect with students on a personal level and support the whole child. Additionally, it is extremely important that schools examine how reading support is provided to students. These findings show that Michelle, Davante, and Josh have spent a great deal of time learning in spaces and structures separate from their peers that are deemed more proficient readers. This has no doubt impacted their reader identities, their confidence as readers, and perhaps their reading achievement. These implications for practice will be explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this case study extend existing research on reading intervention programs and support during the middle grades by examining how the students themselves see reading support and their identities as a result of it. Similar to other studies (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Moreau, 2014; Frankel, 2017; Golden & Pandya, 2018; and Learned, 2019), this research explored how ongoing acts of positioning contribute to participants' identities as readers and students. Building upon that foundation, I explored RTI specifically as a positioning practice and how the components of a middle school reading intervention program contributed to the identity of the participants from their own perspectives through the use of three research questions: How do adolescent readers in a reading intervention program present themselves as readers?; What do these students see as the major impacts on their reader identities?; and How do students describe the reading support they have received in reading intervention? These questions guided the data collection process and analysis, and provided great insight into who the students are as individuals and as readers.

Discussion

As a result of collecting and analyzing data, I have come to realize that there are factors beyond reading skill or ability that impact these students' continual placement in reading intervention programs as well as their reader identity. The data collected and

analyzed and then described in the Chapter Four point to reading choice and personal connections to literacy, teacher support, student behavior, and school structures as factors that have impacted students' position as struggling readers and influenced their reader identities. When considering these factors as a whole and the ways in which they are connected to one another, it becomes apparent that they are all components of the positioning practices that exist in our school system. Positioning practices are systems and processes that schools employ and which serve to place students in certain positions within the school. In the case of the students in this study, their position as struggling readers has been created by their performance on standardized assessments; the amount or type of support they have or haven't received from teachers; the systems that schools employ for responding to behavior; and the literacy curriculum that they have been exposed to. Understanding how positioning practices have created this label and impacted students' reader identity is crucial in understanding the greater impact of these findings.

Positioning Practices.

Building upon the Davies & Harre' (1990) definition of Positioning Theory which asserts that not everyone involved in certain social or contextual episodes has the same access to rights and duties, Frankel et al. (2018) applied this idea to the context of literacy practices and expounded on the idea by examining how those rights and duties were reinforced or undermined by classroom literacy practices. In their study of 12th-grade literacy mentors, they sought to understand how positioning practices such as: placement in reading intervention, standardized testing, and approaches to behavior management have impacted students' descriptions of their own reader identities.

This case study research expanded upon that work of Frankel et al. (2018) by examining how middle school students' own descriptions of their long-term placement in reading intervention not only served to position them as struggling, but also how it impacted their identities as readers and learners. Understanding this phenomenon from the students' perspective was a crucial aspect of this research.

The experiences that an adolescent learner has while in school shape their understanding of themselves. Classroom discourse and social interactions play an important role in positioning students. If we consider each environment that a student inhabits as a Figured Worlds, students' placement in each of those worlds has an impact on their identity. Both the agency that a student enacts and the position that they are given are factors that contribute how the students see themselves and is seen by others. Because people understand their identities through the activities and social relationships of their Figured Worlds, each and every placement has an impact.

The participants in this case study, described experiences in school that positioned them away from their peers for both academic and behavior reasons as well as placed them in reading intervention for many years. Being sent to the office in elementary school or suspended from school in middle school contributed to students' positions, as did leaving the classroom for Book Club or being placed in Literacy Lab. The tracking of students into levels of academic achievement is a placement within the Figured World of a school that positioned these students as struggling readers.

However, participants also described their placement in Literacy Lab as a safe space where they felt supported. Within the Figured World of Literacy Lab, these students found success with a teacher who knew them well and saw them as individuals.

Additionally, within that classroom, students were supported academically and given opportunities to read things that interested them and learn at their own pace. Students' experiences with that kind of learning environment contributed to positive descriptions of their individual reader identities. While each participant sees themselves differently in terms of their reading proficiency and potential, all three of them attributed some positive experiences to their time in Literacy Lab. I would argue a major factor in the variances within their perceived reader identities were formed long before these students reached middle school with their experiences in elementary school playing an important role in how they see themselves as readers.

One key idea that emerged from this study is the importance of educators to consider how each and every student is positioned through their experiences within the classroom and within the school as a whole. They must understand why the experiences of some students are not equitable to those of others. Many children who do not meet the standards measures created by testing are marginalized by a standardized approach to teaching and learning. Michelle, Davante, and Josh have all experienced this marginalization through their participation in an intervention program that was aimed at supporting them. The responses by both their teachers and their schools to their behavior and learning needs have contributed to their positions as struggling readers and their own views of themselves as readers.

Positioning Students with Standardized Literacy Experiences. How adolescents are positioned through their own view of self as well as the way others see them, impacts both their social and academic identities. Menard-Warwick (2007) explained that traditional classroom materials and activities, as well as powerful

classroom discourses, often “constrain students’ possibilities for claiming desirable identities” (p. 270).

The participants in this study were clear that personal connection to literacy and individual interest in reading are important factors in creating their reader identity. The finding also showed that these students report that they do not often experience choice in reading at school nor do they often feel connected to what they are asked to read. Similar to Smagorinsky’s (2017) and Moje’s (2017) studies, the participants in this case study reported the reading they do in school is boring and not disconnected from their home lives. These students did report reading outside of school for various reasons such as social purposes and to read directions for video games. Davante, the most reluctant of the readers, even talked about reading manuals for fixing and assembling his dirt bikes. Students also reported not seeing much of a connection between that reading and the reading that they do in school.

The standardization of literacy experiences that often occurs in the classroom typically assumes a literate learner to be one who can read and write at what is deemed grade level. This level of competency is determined by standardized assessments and curricular measures such as a student’s ability to read from a textbook and answer comprehension questions about what they have read as well writing in response to that text in the form of analytical essays, informational reports, and text-dependent responses.

When students’ performances on these types of tasks are not deemed to be on grade level by standard measures, it is often determined that there is a need to intervene. The findings from data collected in this study show this to be the case for the three participants. Their placement into Literacy Lab in the middle grades was based on their

performance on the state's end of year standardized ELA assessment as well as their performance level on the Spring administration of the reading MAP test. Each of the students also referred to reading level as a reason for their placement in Literacy Lab, explaining that they think they should on the reading level of the grade that they are in, but none of them had reached that mark. Davante even shared that he has never been at the reading level of his current grade. They were keenly aware of reading on grade level as being important, and they knew that the standardized tests that they take measure that competency. They also know that their performance on those assessments is why they are placed in intervention and seen as struggling.

Akin to reading interest and choice, another important aspect of reading that emerged from the findings was the importance of vocabulary knowledge and language acquisition. All three participants discussed the importance of vocabulary and language when they discussed what reading is and what makes someone good at it as well as what makes it difficult. At one time or another each of the students mentioned that vocabulary words are what makes it hard to read sometimes, and that they often mess up on words. While they may not have understood the connections between vocabulary, language, and their own personal experiences, there are many. The vocabulary knowledge and language skills that a student brings to school are deeply personal and connected to their sociocultural experiences. The knowledge that students are equipped with are socially and culturally accumulated bodies of knowledge. Therefore, the vocabulary words that they know and language that they are familiar with may not always match that of what they are exposed to at school. Students' background and experiences are an important

part of who they are, and if they are not recognized in the standardized literacy practices that they experience, we will once again see these students being positioned as struggling.

Positioning Students with School Contexts and Structures. Similar to Moreau's (2014) and Learned's (2016) studies on the impact of reading intervention on adolescent learners, the findings from this case study research point to the organization of students into ability groups and curricular tracks as a factor that can negatively impact learning outcomes. Through similar studies of adolescent learners, Moreau (2014) and Learned (2016) both concluded that learning tracks are created with the intention of providing support to learners, but often result in continued participation in these lower level courses without the gains intended. Responses from the participants in this study uncovered very similar findings. Each of the participants in this study have been participants in reading intervention for at least seven years. This common school practice has created a vicious cycle that solidified their position as struggling readers.

An important aspect of building an effective reading intervention program for middle school students is understanding the role of Tier I instruction. The findings and implications of this study support the assertions of other scholars (Vaughn & Fletcher 2012; Moreau 2014; Frankel, 2017; Golden & Pandya, 2018; Learned, 2019) and extend their thinking to consider how Tier I support may be used to strengthen students' reader identities and position them as successful readers.

According to the school system to which they belong, Michelle, Davante, and Josh have been struggling readers since their early elementary school years. Beginning in the early grades, each of these students was pulled from their general education classroom anywhere from twice a week to every day for reading support. Their removal

from their classroom was with the intention of providing reading support in a one-on-one or small group setting with a focus on intensive skill development. In theory, there is nothing wrong with this approach. However, the unintended consequences of this support are a feeling of isolation from their peers and missing out on instructional opportunities in their regular general education classrooms. There is also the possibility that while the instruction they received during this pull out reading support time was targeted and designed to support students' needs, providing this support outside of the general education classroom increases the likelihood that these students did not experience the same level of rigor as their peers and possibly missed out on other instructional or social opportunities leading to further position them as struggling readers.

For Michelle, Davante, and Josh the support they received in elementary school did not result in the necessary gains or the reintegration back into the general education classroom full time. In an effort to continue to support them, the system placed them in reading intervention for middle school. As adolescent learners, this support was not provided during a removal from their regular ELA classroom, but was done as a replacement for one of their elective classes. Instead of having two electives every day, these students had only one with the second being their Literacy Lab class. In this format, their exclusion from the general education curriculum came in losing out on opportunities to experience the same variety of elective options such as: art, music, band, STEM, computer experiences, or a world language class as their peers. This placement also created social divisions for the students who participate in reading intervention contributing to their position in the school and their identities as learners.

Positioning Students with Behavior Responses. All three of the participants in this study cited times during their school careers where behavior interfered with their learning. Each of the students had at least one story to share about their behavior and how a teacher responded or how their own reactions to something impacted their ability to learn. Davante's experience with behavior at school was the most intense. He described being removed from his classroom on a daily basis and missing a great deal of instructional time due to being sent to the office or put in In School Suspension (ISS). He described this as being the case during elementary school and continuing into middle school, and he explained that he knows his behavior has impacted his learning. At a very young age, he assumed the identity of a poor reader and bad kid. He has carried that identity with him to middle school, and while he does claim some positive experiences with his teacher and learning in Literacy Lab, he still doesn't see himself as someone who can or will be successful.

The school's practice of removing students from the classroom when their behavior doesn't meet expectations, is yet another positioning practice that contributes to the way students are labeled. Like tracking, school discipline practices also serve as institutional contexts that can worsen or ease learning difficulty (Learned, 2016). Similar to conclusions drawn by Fabelo et al. (2011), Skiba et al. (2014), and Learned (2016), the findings of this case study describe what Michelle, Davante, and Josh also know about their reader identities and their positions in school. Their position as struggling readers, and the that they are viewed as students isn't entirely about what they know and can do as readers. There are other factors contributing to their position as struggling readers, and

their experiences with classroom and school behavior practices plays a part in that position.

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited in scope as the analysis and conclusions are drawn from research with only three participants. I cannot assume the experiences of the three participants in this case study are exactly the same as all students who have participated in reading intervention. Similarly, each of the three participants attended three different elementary schools within the same district, so while their experiences in elementary were likely similar (and described as being so by the participants), there are most likely programmatic and instructional variances across the three schools.

Because the data collection process was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are also limitations in what I was able to see and observe in terms of reading instruction. Data collection took place during the portion of the school year when students were learning in a hybrid model and spent three out of five days a week learning virtually from home. Virtual Wednesdays became the best time to collect data because it was the only time that all the students were together for class. However, because of the nature of these virtual classes and the fact that this instructional model was very new to everyone, the kinds of instruction that took place, and the what I was able to observe in those classes was limited. I did not see much in terms of instruction around reading. However, these Virtual Wednesday classes did allow me a great deal of time to talk with students, interview them, and see the teacher/student relationship up close.

Lastly, the data collected are greatly dependent upon the memories of the students and often memories of early childhood which tend to be distorted with time and/or

remembered inaccurately. While the perception of these memories and of the experiences are equally valuable, it is possible that some of what students shared with me was not exactly as the circumstances were. While the findings are not intended to be generalizable, they do highlight the need for more research on the ways that RIT programs can more effectively support adolescent readers and contribute to successful positioning in the school setting as well as ways that schools and districts can provide teachers with training and resources to improve Tier I support at the classroom level.

Implications

The findings in this study point to two major implications for teachers and schools. First, educators must consider how the positioning practices imbedded in reading intervention programs serve to position students as struggling readers and rethink how reading support is provided to adolescent learners. Second, they must re-evaluate how to effectively use Tier I instruction as an alternative to removing students from their classrooms to receive support. It is important for educators to understand that everything that happens in a classroom has an impact on how students view their own individual identity within the context of the classroom or school as a whole. When students engage in discourse, or when they interact with content or assignments, they are doing it in relation to their understanding of themselves. All of this serves to create their position in the classroom. The positions that students assume in their school environments play a role in their academic and social success. No student learns in isolation. Their interactions with others and the influence and affirmation they receive from their teachers impacts their learning and growth. Therefore, it is important for schools to recognize the literacy experiences of adolescents' everyday lives. Incorporating opportunities for

personal literacy experiences into the classroom can have the important benefits of providing socially meaningful learning for students.

Positioning Students for Success. How a student is positioned within their school setting is directly related to their interactions with peers, teachers, content, and experiences. Because positions are always relational, teachers position students through relationships, instruction, and support and thereby influence students' access to certain spaces for action. (Bossier & Lindal, 2019). The kinds of literacy experiences that they are provided will impact the ways that they are positioned as learners. Similarly, teachers and administrators have the unique opportunity to affect change for so many students by creating environments and structures where the experiences and skills that students possess are recognized. Positioning students for success means considering three important things. Teachers must begin to value a broader definition of literacy and focus on strong teacher/student relationships while schools need to reimagine what reading support programs look like for adolescents.

Expanding the Definition of Literacy: One way to position students to be successful is to begin by valuing what they already know and can do. This asset-based approach to adolescent literacy learning considers how students experience literacy in their everyday lives outside of school and realizes the important role that those experiences should also play in the classroom. Michelle, Davante, and Josh were clear that they enjoy reading more when they feel connected to it personally and their interests are considered.

Valuing a broader definition of literacy that considers students' sociocultural experiences will allow for more opportunities for students to be successful and

demonstrate knowledge. This also allows for students to be positioned as successful learners within the classroom setting. In addition to providing more opportunities for success, much of the current research regarding adolescent literacy has shown that these experiences require the same, if not more complex, thinking and application of what has historically been valued as literacy skills. For teachers, this means moving beyond teaching only what is tested on standardized assessments and designing instruction that mirrors those assessments.

Many adolescents understand and communicate their lives through literacy practices. They use these tools to connect, gather information, and to tell their stories. Classroom literacy practices can and should mirror the real-world ways that students use literacy and will use literacy in their futures. Researchers such as Skerrett and Bomer (2011) and Haddix et al. (2017) explain the importance of teachers broadening their definition of literacy practices to include ways that students' out-of-school literacy can inform what happens in schools. Teachers must recognize the many literacy experiences that adolescent students value in order to position them as successful, lifelong learners and provide them with opportunities to engage in real-world applications of these skills.

Building Strong Relationships: Teachers cannot lose sight of the importance of their role in student learning. The relationships that teachers have with students are a crucial part of providing meaningful instruction. Anderson (2009) and Yamakawa et al. (2005) wrote about the ways that students are located within their classrooms as either people who are knowing or people who are not. This positioning is often done by teachers whether consciously or not. Teachers have a powerful influence when considering the ways that they create classroom communities, and the ways that they

respond to students in terms of academic and behavioral needs. Michelle, Davante, and Josh all had strong opinions about what they like and do not like about how teachers behave towards students. They were clear in their beliefs that how a teacher responds to their need for support with learning or behavior has a huge impact on how they feel about the teacher, the class, and learning. The findings described in chapter four revealed that these students will disengage and pretend not to care about school if they do not believe their teachers care about them. It is crucial for teachers to know their students as individuals not only in terms of their academic needs but also in understanding their lives outside of school and the experiences that they carry.

Reimagining Reading Support. Educators must consider how the positioning practices imbedded in reading intervention programs serve to position students as struggling readers. The participants in this study have all experienced the continued placement in reading intervention year after year. This placement, while intended to be supportive, has resulted in tracking these students as intervention level learners. They are now seen this way by the school system, by their teachers, and by themselves. The first aspect of this positioning practice that needs to be reimagined is how the need for support is determined.

The data sources used for placement do not tell the entire story of these readers. Even though they are most often the main source of data used for placement in reading intervention programs, standardized assessments do not provide clear or actionable data for teachers to use in guiding instruction or meeting the needs of individual learners (O'Reilly et al., 2012). The reading data that is available to middle school teachers at Global Middle School is not specific in outlining the areas of support needed for reading

growth. On both the state standardized assessment and the reading MAP assessment, the data provided is a scale score and a percentile rank. Teachers may have access to a rating by domain such as whether a student has met or not met in terms of vocabulary, reading literary texts, reading informational texts, or writing. However, the data are not more specific than that. These are the assessments that are used to place students into the Literacy Lab course, so the concern that the data doesn't provide the entire picture of reading is an important one. Teachers and Administrators must also consider the harm that can be done when students are automatically placed in Tier II reading support solely based on the results of an assessment. These data sources alone are not comprehensive enough to determine if a student needs reading support.

It is evident from this study that the practice of tracking students using these assessments is one of the ways that schools are serving to position students as struggling readers. Global Middle School, the district at large, and adolescent educators in general need to reconsider how students' reading strengths and needs are assessed. Reassessing this process is directly related to what school and teachers' value as literacy and how instruction is designed in response to what is valued. Standardized assessments are not going away any time soon, so it would be unrealistic to eliminate them from the conversation entirely. However, the level of importance placed on them in terms of reading instruction and reading support does need to be reconsidered if we are going to truly support all of our learners.

Another way that reading intervention programs need to be reimaged for adolescent learners is in terms of how Tier I instruction is delivered. The prevalent use of pull out reading support at Global Middle School suggests that Tier I reading support

may not be used frequently or effectively. Michelle's, Davante's, and Josh's descriptions of their ELA teachers' support of their reading needs was in stark contrast to the support they described receiving in Literacy Lab with Mrs. Halo, leading to the conclusion that their ELA teacher was not equipped or willing to help them in the ways they needed it. In the three years that I spent working at Global Middle School, I also observed teachers eager to turn students over to Mrs. Halo if they were deemed behind or struggling with classroom reading tasks. There appeared to be a notion that those students who did not meet certain expectations needed to get extra help from somewhere or someone else. This is not an uncommon idea among teachers of adolescent readers. I have seen it in other schools, and Moreau (2014) found the same to be true with the middle school teachers whom she studied. The majority of those teachers believed that students should come to middle school already proficient readers, and it was not their responsibility to teach those skills. In order to truly reimagine reading intervention programming at the middle school level, I believe the most important component is improving Tier I classroom support. I would also argue that an important first step to addressing this issue is supporting teachers with how to deliver effective Tier I support at the classroom level.

Implications for School Leadership. As a school-based administrator, my lens for viewing instructional support systems within my school and across my district is often a global one. In my experience, this is true for most administrators. Administrators are often challenged with looking at a school's needs or school improvement by considering what can be done to "fix" a system issue or school-wide concern. Understanding reading support from the lens of reader identity and positioning practices challenges school leaders to view reading support with an individualized lens. This study provides

implications for how school administration makes decisions about placement of students into reading support classes or programs as well as the ways that those students are served. I have already begun to challenge leaders at the district level who set parameters for our middle level intervention program by asking questions and suggesting changes to how we identify students for reading support and how we structure our program. While some of my efforts can seem to fall on deaf ears, I plan to continue to push and challenge the status quo, using my study as a support for why changes need to be made.

Improving Student Support

Tier I Support. Tier I support is the instructional strategies and interventions provided to students in the general education classroom. This support can be provided in small groups when needed or be individualized for students (Buffum et al., 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher 2012). Tier I is the instruction that should be happening in all classrooms. It is what educators often mean when they refer to differentiated instruction. It is understanding what each student needs and designing instruction that addresses those needs specifically. It is the classroom instruction that matters most to the development of successful readers (Moreau, 2014).

Tier I support can be most broadly defined as differentiating instruction, but more specifically encompasses structures and strategies that support students without removing them from their regular classroom instruction. This kind of support not only allows students to remain in a learning community that is designed to support them, it helps to build those important student/teacher relationships through individual support and positions students as capable learners.

Tier I support is really the essence of instruction, but it is not always practiced with fidelity. This is especially true at the middle and secondary levels when teachers often begin to apply standardized instructional approaches to the masses. Teachers at these levels are trained to focus more on content than skill or differentiation. An important aspect of the differentiated approach seen in Tier I has to start with knowing what skills and knowledge students are bringing to the task at hand. This means beginning with an understanding of who the learners are in and what knowledge they possess. This can be challenging for teachers who are accustomed to delivering whole class instruction and giving all students the same assignments.

As I consider implications that emerged from this study as well as the work of other scholars (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Ciullo et al., 2016) who have researched this idea, I believe that a closer look at the impact of Tier I supports is a crucial component in understanding the needs of students who are being identified for reading intervention. The first step in an effective model of reading intervention is a school-wide Tier I effort for improving vocabulary and comprehension across content areas. In order to build a strong Tier I foundation, schools and districts need to consider the training and resources provided to teachers, the types of classroom instruction necessary, and the ways that teachers can support individual students.

Training and Resources for Teachers. There are several differences in Tier I instruction between elementary and secondary schools (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Elementary school teachers tend to be more confident in delivering reading instruction and most see it as their primary responsibility. While secondary teachers see content coverage their primary responsibility. Similarly, to what was discovered with Moreau's

(2014) participants, Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) also found that secondary teachers lacked training in terms of reading instruction. This case study did not examine reading support from the teachers' perspectives, but I do believe that the insights that the students shared about their teachers point to similar conclusions as the studies referenced.

Michelle's story about a teacher who told her try to best and figure it out herself when she asked for help with a reading assignment is one example of this. In the same way, Josh sharing that his ELA teacher talks too much and doesn't give students time to talk about what they are reading is more evidence of one-size-fits-all reading instruction. In all of my conversations with students, they never once spoke about choice assignments or choice reading opportunities in their ELA classes, and it appeared that they always had the same exact assignments to complete. From these conversations with the participants, it can be concluded that there is not a great deal of differentiation happening in their ELA classroom nor is there instruction designed to meet individual needs. Whether this is a result of a lack of knowledge on the teacher's part is unclear in this particular instance, but considering the research in this area, I would argue that an important first step for teachers is providing them with professional development and necessary resources to deliver effective Tier I support. Training secondary teachers to deliver effective Tier I instruction could be an important step for schools and districts to take in helping teachers to reposition students from struggling readers to learners with individual needs.

Classroom Climate and Instruction. Effective classroom support assumes that students have different needs and address those through instruction rather than expecting all students to learn the same way or meet the same standards at the same time. This approach allows students to learn at their own pace and assumes that all students bring

some skill and knowledge to the classroom and builds on those skills using an asset approach rather than a deficit one.

The students with whom I researched with in this case study reported that their most enjoyable class, where they learn the most, and where they felt the most successful is Literacy Lab. The instruction in Literacy Lab is rarely whole class. It is very individualized with the majority of interactions being one-on-one with the teacher. Students have choice in what they read and how they respond to their reading. This is a contrast to what these students report experiencing in their other classes, and further confirms the importance of Tier I support. While these three students have felt success in their Literacy Lab class, they generally do not feel success across the content areas or as a whole in their school setting. If general education teachers going to deliver truly effective instruction to all students, ELA classes need to be taught differently. Student choice should be imbedded in all aspects of instruction and teachers should meet students where they are as learners through individual reading conferences and small group support.

Students must also feel that they have the support of caring individuals who believe that they can learn. Student/teacher relationships are the most important factor in having a positive classroom climate. These relationships must go beyond the social aspects of students and teachers knowing one another and center around the academic support that teachers provide. Teachers must believe that students can be successful, and the students must believe that their teachers know they can be successful. When classrooms are built on these principles, we will begin to see more students find success in their classes and less students positioned as struggling readers.

Teacher Support for Individual Students. Failing to recognize the knowledge and experiences that individual students have will continue to create a divide between the kinds of literacies that adolescents view as relevant and the kinds of literacies that they are expected to experience at school. When adolescents do not experience connections to or see the relevance of what they are doing in school, they often become disengaged from learning. Alverman (2012) describes the importance of disrupting, “the dominant discourse that positions some students as non-competent members of the classroom” (p. 21). Too many adolescent learners are seen as non-competent or underperforming or struggling. For the participants in this study, they have carried that label for a long time. In order for schools and teachers to disrupt this narrative for Michelle, Davante, and Josh and for the students who follow behind them, we must consider how to position students for success rather than as struggling.

A crucial aspect of Tier I support is the classroom teacher. Michelle, Davante, and Josh made it clear that the importance of teacher support is not purely instructional. Teachers must be both comfortable and equipped to deliver Tier I instruction which means understanding how to determine students’ strengths and areas for growth; know how and when to use certain strategies; and being willing to use a flexible approach to continuously redesign instruction as needs change. Teachers must also know their students as individuals and understand where they come from and how their personal and social experiences impact them as learners. They must understand their personal identity, their school identity, and their reader identity and how those all intersect in order to be truly effective with their Tier I support.

While this can be a lot to understand about students, it is the foundation of teaching and learning. It is not surprising that teachers who know their students well and build strong relationships with them not only see gains in student achievement but also have less issues with classroom management. When I consider Mrs. Halo's class, and the struggles that her students have had with behavior and discipline during their years in school, it is clear that her relationships with them are a key component to her lack of issues with behavior. She begins by focusing on what her students know and building on those skills. This is not only an important part of Tier I instruction, it is an important part of building trusting relationships. Because they trust her, Mrs. Halo's students are willing to learn from her, and she is able to position them for success.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study suggest that schools and districts need to understand how the literacy practices that they employ often serve to position students as struggling. There is a need to further explore RTI as a positioning practice, and specifically seek understand of the ways that Tier I RTI support can be better utilized as a literacy practice that can dismantle the position of struggling reader. Future research in the area of reading intervention and identity should focus on two crucial areas: the structure of RTI programing in the middle grades and the role of Tier I support within those programs.

While there is some existing research (Johnson & Smith, 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Moreau, 2014; Ciullo et al., 2016) exploring the effects of reading intervention programs at the middle school level specifically, the body of research is not extensive and is heavily focused on Tier II and Tier II supports systems and strategies. The results of this study point to a need for research that examines the

ways that students are identified for intervention support and how that support is provided to adolescent readers in the middle grades. The focus of examining existing programs should consider two things: what practices are most effective for students in terms of reading growth and what is most effective in terms of developing positive reader identities.

Separating students from their peers to provide them with reading instruction outside of the classroom is a form of tracking that has a lasting impact on their identity and position in school. There is a need for further research to explore how reading support can be provided to students without labeling them as struggling and segregating them from the learners we deem to be proficient. Further research on Tier I support at the classroom level in middle school is a crucial next step. However, in order to implement effective Tier I support, teachers must be knowledgeable and skilled at doing so. Therefore, we must also explore the types of training and support that teachers receive to be equipped in providing Tier I support at the middle school level as well as how effective that training and support is. Future research also needs to examine what is or can be done to improve the training and support for those teachers who work with adolescent readers.

Conclusions

As I grew to know the students in this study as individuals, what I learned about them and their experiences in school was eye opening. These students are very bright, full of knowledge, and insightful. Even though this is true, they are labeled as struggling readers because they do not “meet grade level standards” or show typical growth on standardized assessments. While these students do not meet the literacy expectations that

school requires of them, they are intelligent and skillful. They listen to various kinds of music, and they read and write in their free time. They watch videos on YouTube and send messages to each other through video games and social media. They express themselves through “tweets” and “snaps” using images and words to explain how they feel. They may not all be inclined to pick up a novel and read it cover to cover, but they will read web pages that teach them how to play video games and search for interesting facts about famous people they admire on the internet.

For far too long, I wondered and worried about these students. I have wondered about why they continue to be labeled as struggling readers and why extra support, such as reading intervention, seems to have little impact on their reading achievement. Through this case study research and the extensive amount of time spent with the participants, I have come to understand that the literacy experiences that they have been provided in school have often not met their needs, and how they see themselves as learners and more specifically readers, has been greatly influenced by their position in school.

How they are grouped as learners in classes, how their teachers respond to them in terms of academic support and behavior, and how or where they do or do not see themselves in the curriculum are all positioning practices that have influenced their identity. It is our duty as educators to examine how we can better support these students and how we can positively position them to dismantle their position as that of struggling readers and reposition them as successful, contributing members of their schools and communities.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

The Impact of Reading Intervention Supports on Adolescent Reader Identity

Please read the following consent form carefully before choosing to sign for consent to participate.

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:

You are invited to volunteer for a research study conducted by Erin Doty. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Language and Literacy, at the University of South Carolina. The University of South Carolina, Department of Language and Literacy is sponsoring this research study. The purpose of this study is to understand students' thoughts and feelings about the reading support they have received in Literacy Lab and other similar classes. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a student in Literacy Lab with important experiences to share. This study is being done at Irmo Middle School and will involve approximately 10 volunteers.

The following is a short explanation of this study to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later in this form.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of adolescent students who have been in a reading support class for more than three years. The study will aim to investigate how adolescent readers feel about school and learning as a result of their participation in reading intervention; how they perceive reading; and what impact their participation with reading support has had on them as readers. Because reading is a process that relies so heavily on a person's experience and perspectives, it is crucial to understand the process from the reader's perspective. Through this study, I will seek to understand the experiences of adolescent readers who participate in reading support. Through this research, I hope to be able to find ways to better support these students as well as help to guide the teachers who work with them to better support their needs.

PROCEDURES:

This study will consist of observations done in your Literacy Lab classroom, discussion or interviews with me that will be recorded, and the review of some of your assignments, activities, or assessments from your Literacy Lab class.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will do the following:

1. Be observed during your Literacy Lab class.
2. Have an audio recording done of your discussion/interview with me in order to ensure the details that you provide are accurately captured.
3. Allow me to review some of the work (Burke Reading Inventory, Reader Identity Survey, and one of your LLI Assessments) that you do in your Literacy Lab class.
4. Allow me to access your MAP and SCReady scores that were used for placement into Literacy Lab.

DURATION:

Participation in the study involves 2-4 classroom observations and 2-4 discussions/interviews over a period of 12 weeks. Each study visit will last about 30 minutes.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

Some of our discussions will be in small groups of 4-5 people. Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone. The researcher cannot guarantee what you say will remain completely private, but the researchers will ask that you, and all other group members, respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

BENEFITS:

Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. However, this research may help researchers and teachers better understand how Literacy Lab and other reading classes impact students' learning as well as how to better help students in the area of reading.

COLLECTION OF IDENTIFIABLE PRIVATE INFORMATION

Any identifiable information collected about you will be kept private. No one except for me and your Literacy Lab teacher will have access to your private information. Anything written or published as a result of this study will not include any identifiable information about you.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:

The information that is obtained in connection with this research study will remain confidential. Any information disclosed will be with your express written permission. Study information will be securely stored in locked files and on password-protected computers. Results of this research study may be published or presented at seminars; however, the report(s) or presentation(s) will not include your name or other identifying information about you.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email the principal investigator listed on this form.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have any more questions about my participation in this study, or a study related injury, I am to contact Erin Doty at 803-476-3750 or email ecdoty@lexrich5.org.

Questions about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

I give permission for my child's interviews and/or discussion groups to be audio recorded for the purpose of this study.

If do you wish to participate, please sign here.

Signature of Subject / Participant

Date

Signature of Subject / Participant's Legal Guardian

Date

Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Or

I do not agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

If do not you wish to participate, please sign here.

Signature of Subject / Participant

Date

Signature of Subject / Participant's Legal Guardian

Date

Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Reading/School
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you feel when your teacher says that it's time to read?2. What are your first memories of reading?3. What is your first memory of any kind of reading? Someone reading to you or your reading of a book or anything else?4. What do you think about how people learn to read?5. What do you think about how people learn to talk? Is talking (having conversations) the same at home as it is in school?6. What do you think reading is all about? How would you describe it to someone else?7. What do you think the purpose of reading is? How do you use reading?8. What can teachers do to help students become better at reading?9. Tell me about your literacy lab class. What is it like?10. What is the purpose of that class?11. Does it help you with your reading? How?12. Did you have a class like that in elementary school? How many years did you go?13. What do you remember about that class? What was it like? What was the purpose?14. Did it help you with your reading? How?15. Do you like being in these reading classes?16. Are they good for you overall or not?17. What would you tell someone else about these reading classes?
Reader Identity
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What kinds of things do you like to read?2. Do you read when you aren't in school? Why or why not?3. How do you or do you use reading or writing when you aren't in school?4. How is that similar or different to how you use reading and writing in school?5. Do you read more in school or out of school?6. Are your reasons for reading outside of school different than in school?7. What adults do you know that read a lot?8. Why do you think those adults read a lot?9. Why do most people your age read?10. Do you think reading is hard or easy? Why?11. What do you do when reading is hard?12. Which teacher or class helps you the most with reading?

Reading Support
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What would you tell someone else about your experience in school with reading?2. Do you think you need literacy lab? Why or why not?3. Did you need the reading class in elementary school?4. Since you took these reading classes in elementary school, why do you think you still need one now?5. Tell me a story that stands out in your memory about reading in school.6. Tell me a story that stands out in your memory about reading out of school.7. What helps you the most with reading- the teacher or what she/he teaches you?8. Talk to us about standardized tests (MAP, SCReady).9. What do you think about those tests?10. How do you usually feel when you take those tests?

APPEXNDIX C

READER IDENTITY SURVEY

How do you feel about reading?			
I have always liked reading.	True	Sometimes True	False
I used to like reading but now I don't.	True	Sometimes True	False
I like reading but only if I get to choose what I read.	True	Sometimes True	False
I don't like reading and I never have.	True	Sometimes True	False
What kind of reader are you?			
I am good at reading aloud.	True	Sometimes True	False
I read at a good rate-not too fast and not too slowly.	True	Sometimes True	False
I am good at reading when I read to myself.	True	Sometimes True	False
I read every day.	True	Sometimes True	False
I read a variety of books.	True	Sometimes True	False
I read enough to be the best reader that I can be.	True	Sometimes True	False
I read books that are right for me personally.	True	Sometimes True	False
I can read for long periods of time without wanting to stop.	True	Sometimes True	False

I work hard to understand what I read.	True	Sometimes True	False
When you are reading, do you do these things?			
I make a movie in my head.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I notice when I don't understand what I am reading.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I make notes or write things down to help me understand.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I think about what I already know that will help me understand.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I think of other things that I have read that will help me understand.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I make predictions about what will happen next.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I read with questions in my mind and try to find the answers while I read.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I notice words that I don't know and try to learn them.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
I stop every now and then to remember what I read.	Always or Often	Sometimes True	False
What kinds of books interest you? (choose all that are true for you). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture Books ("everyone" books) • Biographies (about people) • Articles (from magazines, newspapers, the internet) • Funny Books (with or without "drawings") • Books with characters who are a lot like me • Scary Books (horror, ghosts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books about relationships (romance, families, friendships) • Fantasy (unicorns, fairies, wizards, elves) • Science Fiction (out space, genetic mutations) • Graphic Novels (manga, comic book style) • Books about science • Books about history • Poetry 		