Middle School Literacy Practices, Teachers who Construct them, and Students
who Experience Reading Difficulties and Disabilities

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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July 2015

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Kate (Smith) Horn. From our first days of teaching together, Kate inspired me with her passion for and knowledge about middle school readers. Many years of friendship later, she was my greatest cheerleader as I started this journey. As it comes to an end, I miss her daily but I continue to be inspired by her. Stay platinum.

Abstract

Public narratives about middle school literacy utilize high-stakes assessment results to categorize students, often in unilateral and unproductive ways (Franzak, 2006; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009). In contrast, empirical evidence suggests middle school students who fail to meet proficiency benchmarks represent a variety of skill profiles (Dennis, 2013; Lesaux & Keiffer, 2010) and interact with peers, texts, and teachers differently based on their identities and perceived identities (Hall, 2009; 2012). Despite this evidence, broad categorizations of students play a role in the design of many middle school instruction programs. Classroom literacy practices are influenced by teachers' interpretations of this information as well as other historical and local factors as they construct uniquely situated local literacy practices.

This dissertation, structured as three separate but related papers, examines the intersection of a social practice view of literacy and a social construction view of disability. By documenting the literacy practices observed, the teachers' aims in constructing them, and the participation of students who are identified as struggling, this dissertation particularized what reading disability and difficulty meant for two students across multiple contexts in one middle school. Implications of this research suggest that understanding students with reading difficulties and disabilities from multiple perspectives, centering on their expertise, will enable teachers to enact more inclusive practices and contribute new viewpoints to research.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In my professional roles as a high school special education teacher and a middle school reading specialist, my interactions with individual students often crossed multiple contexts within a school. I had a unique perspective that enabled me to observe teachers' varied expectations and students' responses. I felt fortunate that many of the students I worked with allowed me to see both their strengths and their struggles. Sharing a laugh over Calvin and Hobbes or a tear over Winn-Dixie allowed me to see these young people as readers in ways that many of their other teachers did not. Knowing them this way made it all the more frustrating when students struggled to participate or chose not to participate in classroom literacies because they did not know where to begin with a complex task or because the text was too daunting to tackle alone; I can only imagine the frustration they felt.

As a professional working with students identified as having difficulty with reading, I was curious about the ways that students' struggles became more or less apparent in different classroom contexts. In particular, I noticed how students' participation in each environment changed relative to the texts used, the assignments required, and the social context created by the teacher and peer groups. Students who appeared to excel in discussions about texts in one class might struggle with written assignments in others. While academics, social relationships, motivation, and content surely factored into this variation, no single factor or consistent combination appeared to explain all students' success or struggles. These often fluctuated within a given class period.

In the middle school setting, I also observed teachers facing curricular tensions between providing students with interventions to remediate apparent skills deficits (like those they received in elementary school) and accommodations to meet the demands of preparing for high school classes. It seemed that while terms like "developmentally appropriate" were used frequently, what this meant in terms of the balance between foundational reading skills and disciplinary literacies was unclear.

General and special education teachers collaborated on grade level teams to use their knowledge of students' needs to shape assignments. Still, my unique position allowed me to see the incongruities between the skills and identities students were expected to present in each classroom context. Students who were known to be "struggling readers" often had difficulty with the same assignments as the students with identified reading disabilities, but had access to different accommodations and different supports within the school structure. Many students had access to both general and special education teachers through many co-taught core classes; some received additional support through special education services and others general education interventions. Some teachers made accommodations for any students who appeared to need them; other teachers were more exacting about what was officially documented. As students moved throughout their schedules, there was little consistency in students' experiences, causing me to wonder if that contributed to students' academic difficulties.

Research Problem

Traditional understandings of reading difficulties and disabilities often use autonomous skill assessment benchmarks to label middle grades students as "struggling,"

"at-risk," or "disabled." These categorizations suggest a singular view of students who struggle that indicates they may experience universal failure in school. This static view does little to recognize the complexity of middle grades students' reading behaviors (Ivey, 1999).   Teachers who rely on high-stakes reading assessments may adopt an over-simplified, deficit-oriented perspective of students may find it difficult to embrace students' strengths and create meaningful instruction that struggling readers will choose to participate in. High-stakes reading assessments might be better understood as a representation of what students "can and will do under a specific set of conditions rather than a fixed set of abilities and disabilities" (Lipson & Wixson, 1986, p.120).

High-stakes assessment and related accountability policies may also present singular views of school literacy that do little to recognize the practical complexities of middle school classrooms. School literacy might be better understood if, instead of viewing it as a homogenous entity, it is recognized as the multiple, locally constructed practices that occur in classrooms. While all school literacy practices are subject to historical and social influences (Heath & Street, 2008) within secondary schools, literacies are often situated within and further influenced by the subcultures of disciplines (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 2001). Institutional histories and disciplinary natures both have an impact on the shape of classroom literacy practices, but focusing only on these historical influences may shortchange the work teachers and students do to shape local literacy practices (Moje & Dillon, 2006).

In addition, disability or "failure" could be understood as a social construction to allow researchers to better document the ways that context affects the ways that students'

abilities are understood. Social institutions, such as schools establish criteria for success and categories to describe individuals who do not reach those benchmarks (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). In schools, these labels may serve useful purposes when trying to plan supportive services for students; however, these identification may not always continue to be applicable when the students enter new contexts where the criteria and expectations are different. Through better understanding classroom contexts and how students' skills and identities vary within and across them, educators can more closely focus on the contextual factors that are most meaningful for learners. It is with these multiple perspectives about learners, literacies, and disabilities that I seek to answer the over-arching question: *In what ways do locally constructed literacies enable or disable two struggling middle grades readers?*

Rationale

Students' experiences of reading difficulties and disabilities are likely to reflect a variety of cognitive, internal factors that affect their reading processes as well as layers of sociocultural contexts that may affect their learning or position them in certain ways in school. A comprehensive understanding of individuals with reading difficulties or disabilities should recognize that both cognitive and sociocultural factors interact within each reader. Though several models have proposed these interactions (Coles, 1987; Lipson & Wixson, 1986; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1996), few empirical studies have employed these models. Understanding students' difficulties with reading this way suggests that multiple theoretical frameworks and research methodologies might inform research. The present work recognizes variation in reading abilities as differences in the

cognitive processes of individuals while drawing upon a sociocultural theory of learning informed by Vygotsky's (1978) theories about the social nature of constructing meaning and Lewis, Enciso, and Moje's (2007) inclusion of identity, agency, and power.

As the most pressing, complex questions in literacy research may best be addressed through multiple theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Dillon, O'Brien, & Heilman, 2000), so too can studies of disability benefit from varied methodological approaches (Danforth, 2006). In particular, investigations from a sociocultural perspective can inform "complex questions about development, learning, and instruction and to understand the cultural communities in schools" (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008, p.313).

It is for this reason that I seek to particularize two students' experiences with reading difficulty and reading disability through qualitative research methodologies. Each of the participants in my study was identified as needing support in reading through a different process and the study of each student's learning would typically be addressed through a different research tradition. By studying both the phenomena of reading disability and reading difficulties in the same work, I aim to bring perspectives together, hoping to contribute to the "interdisciplinary and systematic engagement with the notion of culture" that Artiles, Thorius, Bal, Neal, Waitoller, & Hernandez-Saca (2011) called for in an effort to enrich and diversify traditional special education research by affording "the field of LD the possibility of tracing the key mediational roles that institutional practices play in the production of school failure" (p.176).

Critical perspectives have informed this research by shedding light on institutional inequities experienced by many students who are identified as having disabilities in schools (Ferri & Connor, 2005; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspectives suggest challenging this history by bringing the voices and experiences of those with disabilities to the forefront. While there is generally a greater need to study students' responses to understand teachers' pedagogical practices (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 2001), this need is even more pronounced in groups that have traditionally been silenced such as students with disabilities (Connor, 2008). Critical studies of disability often regard school and other social institutions as the creators of disability categories in a broad sense without examining the ways that actual institutional practices influence actual students in a locality. To begin to address this concern, researchers have begun to using varied frameworks to contextualize the student of disability. For example, Dudley-Marling (2011) utilized a sociocultural framework to study the social literacy practices in a classroom rather than focusing on the deficits/disabilities. I anticipate my work will add to the emerging body of diverse explorations about what it means for students to have learning disabilities in school contexts.

<div align="center">**Overview of the Dissertation**</div>

In order to present multiple perspectives on school practices, my dissertation is presented in an alternative dissertation format (Duke & Beck, 1999). In this introduction I will provided an overview of the study and each manuscript, including a rationale for the frameworks that they are based on. Chapter one is followed by three manuscripts

including a theoretical paper and two manuscripts developing different perspectives on cases from the same study. A concluding chapter is then provided that will tie the three papers together, discuss plans for additional analysis, and propose areas for future research.

The first manuscript, "Reconceptualizing Struggling Adolescent Readers and Their Teachers," is a conceptual paper that seeks to theorize how teachers' conceptions of readers' struggles might inform their instructional practices. By questioning three theoretical conceptions of reading difficulty or disability, I examined the assumptions that authors of these models offer about students and how they positioned teachers in response. The both/and conception of readers proposed in this piece informed the design of the study described in the following manuscripts. The second manuscript, "Teachers' Constructions of Middle School Literacy Practices," reports on the literacy practices observed in 6th grade classrooms and the ways that teachers have constructed these practices. The third manuscript, "Two Struggling Readers Learning to Navigate Sixth Grade Literacies" details the experiences of two 6th grade students identified as needing support by their school and their experiences in core content classes and in general and special education intervention classes. This manuscript foregrounds students' own perspectives on middle school literacy practices, represented in their own words as well as data used to categorize the students in their school.

Overview of the Study

One goal of my research was to understand the variation amongst literacy practices as they are constructed in one group of middle school classrooms.

Understanding the literacies practiced in school to require certain kinds of reading and writing, but also be more than a set of autonomous skills, I examined the ways that classroom practices were historically and locally situated. My analysis looked at the ways that teachers interpreted institutional influences while defining literacy in their own classrooms as well as the role their knowledge about students' abilities plays in this decision-making.

A second goal for the dissertation was to understand what this variation means for two sixth grade students who were identified by their schools as struggling readers. I observed these students as they moved between general education and special education contexts, learning how to work with seven teachers a day with different practices and expectations. My analysis placed students' descriptions of their participation in these contexts at the forefront, and I reflected on the ways that teachers' observations, as well as my own, confirmed, contradicted, and complicated their perspectives.

The manuscripts found in chapters three and four each represent a different focus on the same multi-case study. Taken together, they address the following research questions:

1. What do classroom literacy practices look like in the sixth grade classrooms in this study?

2. How do teachers participate in constructing these practices? What is their reasoning behind structuring lessons as they do?

3. What do classroom literacy practices look like for the two sixth grade students identified as "struggling readers" in this study?

4. How do these students participate in the practices? What are their perspectives about the different literacy practices they encounter in school?

5. How do school identifications of reading difficulties and reading disabilities apply to students in different classroom contexts?

A third goal of my dissertation was to begin exploring the role teachers' beliefs play in their work with struggling readers. Existing research has established that teachers' deficit thinking about students who are culturally different often negatively affects their behaviors towards students, resulting in discriminatory or exclusionary practices, including special education referral (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Scott & Ford, 2011). Conversely, teacher self-efficacy research has demonstrated that teachers' beliefs about themselves may positively affect the ways that they work with students they perceive as struggling, making them more responsive (see Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009 for a review). It stands to reason that there is potential for teachers' beliefs about struggling readers and the origins of their difficulties to affect the work that they engage in with youth, beginning with how they see themselves positioned to support these readers.

Design Overview

The study presented in chapters three and four used descriptive case study design (Yin, 2014), centered on two students who were identified as the cases. For the students, all of their academic classes and teachers were included; exploratory classes (art, physical education, etc.) and social spaces within the school were not. Each case was built

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primarily through ethnographic observations and interviews, with artifact collection and review of students' academic files supplementing data collection.

The study setting, Highland Middle School, was the sole grade 6-8 school in its district, serving approximately 900 racially and ethnically diverse students. Participants include two sixth grade students and nine of the teachers and one of the administrators who supported them. Focal students were identified for participation by knowledgeable school staff because of their inclusion in general education and special education reading support services.

Research and Perspectives Grounding the Study

The literature bases addressing reading difficulties and reading disabilities are largely distinct, often emanating from different divisions in the field of education. Historically, students are labeled one way or the other based on assessments intended to reveal the cause or extent of their reading difficulties; however, in syntheses of empirical research, Wharton-McDonald (2011) asserted that "students with reading disabilities are more like their non-disabled peers than they are different from them" (p.265) and Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) suggested that effective instruction for struggling readers and students with disabilities need not be "dramatically different" than for their peers (p.159). My experience confirms that students' classifications may shift over time or when they move to a new school district. For these practical reasons, as well as the theoretical perspectives that inform the following papers, I chose to consider students with reading difficulties and students with reading disabilities within the same study.

Much of the extant literature addresses these two groups separately, often from different research paradigms. Research on students with reading disabilities often addresses disability identification and skill intervention; research on "struggling readers" often addresses issues of identities and engagement. In my work, I explored how individuals' reading identities, skills, and challenges related to those identities and skills, presented in varied school contexts. Operating from the perspective that both readers' abilities and identities affect their experiences in school, I sought to bring together knowledge from different educational fields and include students in my research who were identified as having identified Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) in reading and who were identified as "struggling readers" more generally. Because of my interest in the contextual definitions of these student labels, I relied on the expertise of school personnel to identify students who received general education interventions and special education services for reading in the sixth grade to inform me of how these constructs were operationalized in this school setting.

As I got to know these two particular young people, I learned that both met August and Shanahan's (2006) definition of Language Minority (LM) learners. This designation applies to them as they both come from homes where a language other than English is actively used, in their cases Spanish. Only one student, Mason, was currently enrolled in the school's English as a Second Language program, so he was also classified as an English Learner (EL).

In summary, I believe that presenting my research through an alternative dissertation format will create spaces to focus on the perspectives of both the teachers and

the students in my study. Representing my research in this manner will illustrate the ways that teachers' and students' work together in the classroom is always interactive and the positions and identities that they inhabit in the classroom are always in relation to one another. By documenting the literacy practices observed and the participation of students who were identified as struggling, this study will particularize what reading disability and difficulty mean for specific students and their teachers in this context.

CHAPTER 2: Reconceptualizing Struggling Adolescent Readers and Their Teachers

Rationale

Whether negative or positive, perhaps characterizing has been relied on so heavily in the field [of middle grades education] because of a need to define and classify, both as humans uncomfortable with liminal status and as educators needing to teach each day in real classrooms with real students. (Bishop, 2012, p.167)

In schools there is a prevalent practice, and as Bishop argues, a practical utility to labeling students. In literacy, students are often compared against developmental norms or categorized in developmental stage models (e.g. Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1998; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2012). Despite instructional information these developmental comparisons provide, there is still danger that they will reinforce assumptions about how students *should* perform that inevitably paint some students as failures or less-than. Regardless of the practical reasons schools characterize students, Vagle (2012) establishes that constructed categories "are not neutral acts" (p.27). This is evident with middle grades readers who have not yet successfully navigated the learn to read/read to learn divide constructed by Chall's developmental stage model (1983).

Chall's (1983) model indicates that readers need to develop fluent word recognition by third grade or be at a disadvantage when they encounter challenging concepts and vocabulary in fourth grade texts. This model is consequential as it has established a wide-spread dichotomy between students learning to read (up through third grade) and reading to learn (in fourth grade and beyond). This division has become

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increasingly powerful with its instantiation into public education policies, in particular in states mandating retention for students not meeting third grade reading benchmarks (e.g., Florida, Iowa, Ohio). Chall's (1983) model and others that have been influenced by it (e.g. Ehri, 1998; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2012), are sometimes used as proxies for identifying reading difficulty or creating a "'road map' for understanding reading disability" (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998, p.120). With developmental expectations playing this substantial role in teachers' understandings of their students, it is not a great leap to suggest that teachers understand their own roles in terms of similar parameters. Therefore, when students perform differently than developmental models suggest, teachers may find they need to re-examine their roles as well.

Alvermann (2001) advocates consideration of "how we, as educators and concerned adults, have established cultural norms that outline particular identities for youth whom we then define as either struggling or not struggling with reading" (p. 680). I press educators further to consider who plays the role of "expert" in enacting these norms and what role we, as educators, play in response to students' struggles. In this paper, I examine what it means to "struggle" with reading in the middle grades and how three different theoretical conceptions of "struggling readers" position teachers. First, I will briefly review these three conceptions. Second I will question: What does this say about struggling adolescent readers? Who is positioned as the "expert" in this conception? What does this mean for the roles of teachers? Finally, I will explore the possibilities that are opened up by reconceptualizing struggling readers and their teachers.

Three Conceptions of Reading Difficulty/Disability

Just as each of us may enact multiple identities, struggling adolescent readers may bring multiple identities based on the literacies they practice, the cultures they claim, and their membership in this particular age group into their classrooms each day (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). These socially-constructed identities have all been influenced by institutional assumptions, but in this paper I examine only the "struggling" aspect. Students are often identified as "struggling readers" when they fail to achieve in the ways that developmental expectations suggest, particularly in association with poor performance on standardized tests (Dennis, 2008; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008) and other policy-driven concerns (Franzak, 2006). By exploring the complex reality of adolescent literacy, the combination of two "ill-defined constructs," Moje et al. (2008) complicate what literacies in adolescents' lives look like in their communities. I take a similar particularized view of practices that are both situated and socially motivated, acknowledging that adolescents read and write more than popular conceptions might suggest. However, this recognition does not manage to extricate adolescents from the label struggling readers; it merely complicates what that struggle means.

In this paper, I use the terms "struggling readers" and "reading disability," broadly and interchangeably to describe the experience of students not achieving commensurate with developmental expectations, regardless of label. Syntheses of empirical research have established that effective instruction for struggling readers and students with reading disabilities need not be "dramatically different" than for their peers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p.159). Further, Klenk and Kibby (2000) suggest that

regardless of the terms used, the process of labeling is likely to have the same effect of blaming students for reading difficulties they experience. Guided by these assertions, I use "struggle" throughout this paper to refer a range of less-than-expected classroom reading achievement while acknowledging that there may be different reasons for it.

The Traditional Conception of Reading Disability/Difficulty

Traditional models of reading disability or struggle suggest a deficit within the individual that prevents achievement from meeting developmentally "normal" or desired benchmarks. Historically, the cause of reading problems have been attributed to medical conditions, cognitive processing deficits, or simply lack of adequate development. While these perspectives have been grounded in popular research and understandings of learning that have shifted over time, they each rely on the assumption of students' internal deficits that reflect a deprivation approach (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Public education policy as well as legal criteria for identifying disabilities have upheld this traditional perspective as the dominant method for discussing reading difficulties and disabilities in schools for some time. Recent trends in high-stakes standardized testing have in many ways reified assumptions about what it means for some students to pass grade level assessments and for others to fail (Franzak, 2006).

The Social Model of Reading Disability/Difficulty

Challenging this traditional conception, McDermott and Varenne's (1995) culture-as-disability model posits it is not individual traits that inherently contain abilities or disabilities, but rather the way society is structured to treat these differences. Also referred to as the social model (Abberley, 1987 as cited in Gabel, 2005), when applied to

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literacy learning, this model suggests viewing struggle as a larger, cultural phenomenon

need not position someone as lesser or other, but simply highlights different components

of a common cultural fabric (Alvermann, 2001). In this view, possessing a particular trait

might mean that someone is marginalized or has a "disability" in one cultural setting

(such as school and the literate practices privileged there) but might not in another. As

Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) assert, "'Good readers' and 'struggling readers' exist...

because schools create a culture that supports the categorization of some youth as

successful and others as failing" (p.8).

The Both/And Conception of Reading Disability/Difficulty

A third conception of struggle takes a both/and approach (Brown, 2012),

accounting for the possibility that individual readers may have varying abilities while

also experiencing contextual factors that serve to disable them in schools. Siebers (2008)

suggests that critical and cultural theorists who endorse the culture-as-disability model

have neglected the lived experiences of those with disabilities and proposes a theory of

complex embodiment. Siebers (2008) draws from feminist theories of embodiment (e.g.,

Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1986, as cited in Siebers, 2008) that posit situated knowledge

as embodied. In disability studies, embodiment represents a type of knowledge about the

relationship between the social environment and human ability. Siebers (2008) extends

this into a theory of complex embodiment that suggests the real disabling effects of social

environments and the real effects of physical conditions may be equally important to

individuals. Complex embodiment theory recognizes the "variability between

individuals and… within an individual's life cycle [that]… need to be considered in

tandem with social forces affecting disability" (Siebers, 2008, p.25). In this conception, I stretch Siebers' (2008) complex embodiment theory to address the less readily visible disabilities and difficulties related to reading. Further, Siebers (2008) suggests "disability" as another possible identity; once one is labeled, or chooses the label of "disabled" this might remain part of one's identities regardless of context. Attending solely to the social, cultural constructions around students' struggles may cause educators to overlook the embodied experiences of those who have constructed identities that include disability.

These three conceptions respectively portray ability as something particular to an individual (traditional approach), as a construction of culture (cultural approach), or as a combination that recognizes the societal implications of having a disability alongside the physical experience of having it (complex embodiment). Which of these conceptions teacher education programs, schools, and individual teachers take up will have a profound impact on the way that teachers are positioned to help the adolescents who do experience difficulty with performing school literacy tasks.

Mode of Inquiry

To explore their beliefs about teaching adolescents, Finders (1998) elicited narratives from preservice teachers. By scrutinizing the metaphors they used to describe adolescents, Finders (1998) revealed how the discourses university students employed projected how they positioned themselves as future teachers. Using a similar approach, I have examined various accounts presenting the discourses of three established conceptions of struggling readers and explored how each positions teachers in response.

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I examined a traditional, developmental model of struggle through Spear-Swerling and Sternberg's "road map" (1998); I examined the culture-as-disability model as presented by McDermott and Varenne (1995); I examined the complex embodiment theory presented in Siebers' (2008) *Disability Theory*. To each of the three conceptions, I posed the questions: What does this say about struggling adolescent readers? Who is positioned as the "expert" in this conception? What does this mean for the roles of teachers?

Assertions

Based on my analysis, I assert three positions that conceptions of struggling readers may create for teachers:

1. Conceptualizing middle grades struggling readers as *deprived* places teachers in a position to provide instruction defined by "fixing" them.

2. Conceptualizing middle grades struggling readers as having *cultural identities* (where the struggle is seen as a conflict between cultures) places teachers in a position to provide instruction based on engaging readers' funds of knowledge.

3. Conceptualizing middle grades struggling readers as having *multiple identities that may include disability* positions teachers to provide an answerable education (Vagle, 2010) for the complex particulars that each individual student brings to class each day.

I will elaborate on each position below by explaining where the problem is perceived to be, who the experts are, and how it positions teachers.

Discussion of Assertions

*Conceptualizing middle grades struggling readers as **deprived** places teachers in a position to provide instruction defined by "fixing" them.*

Traditional conceptions of struggling readers locate the perceived problems within the individual students, citing neurological, biological, or cognitive processing differences that exist uniquely within a reader. While Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1998) describe their model as interactive, their "road map," like other traditional models, indicates that disability occurs when students fail to reach the developmental norms prescribed for their peer group. This conception of struggle relies on a linear view of development where the student who is not achieving to expectations is considered deficient or deprived (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). In this view, a student's abilities are typically quantified by standardized tests or batteries of psychometric assessments, often employing discourses from medicine and psychology which may not translate easily to the instructional language of the classroom.

In this conception, the diagnostician who is most conversant with these measures is positioned as the expert. In response to this deficit view, teachers are positioned to "fix" or "cure" something that is thought to be medical or psychological in nature. Just as a teacher would not be expected to treat a student's asthma, "treating" a reading disability that is understood to be a neurological deficit, seems equally unfeasible. When it is believed that the difficulties students are experiencing are the result of an internal, biological problem many educators may, understandably, feel unqualified or unprepared to address this struggle (Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011).

Without specifying the cause of readers' struggles, standardized assessment paradigms also locate academic skill "deficits" within students, and often within entire groups of students, portraying some groups as "lacking" while making others invisible in larger policy discussions (Vasudevan & Campano, 2009). Despite evidence that struggling readers experience different challenges with text (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Catts, Compton, Tomblin, & Bridges, 2012; Catts, Hogan, & Fey, 2003; Leach, Scarborough, & Rescorla (2003); Rupp & Lesaux, 2006), the wide spread use of standardized assessments driving policy and academic placement determinations treat them as a homogeneous group (Dennis, 2013). This practice, along with policy and curricula that stipulate remediation of foundational skills assume that middle school struggling readers struggle with reading because they have not yet developed foundational skills despite evidence to the contrary (Dennis, 2008; Franzak, 2006; Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010; Rupp & Lesaux, 2006).

It is common for secondary teachers to expect students to come with basic reading skills and feel ill-prepared or not responsible for teaching reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). These feelings may lead to avoidance, potentially exacerbated by the misconception that all struggling students need intensive intervention in foundational skills or constrained skills (e.g., letter knowledge) (Paris, 2005). General educators may take the stance that students characterized as deprived or deficient are the responsibility of specialists and view themselves as freed from responsibility for the students' failure in school (Reid & Valle, 2004). Compounding this is the reality that middle grades teacher candidates are "rarely given sufficient training to teach children how to read in ways

relevant to disciplinary English" (Hall et al., 2011, p.20) or other any of the other disciplines.

Finders' (1998) participants characterized adolescents as being so ruled by hormones that they had "lost all ability to reason," effectively rendering the teachers as powerless (p. 256). Just as these descriptions of adolescent students were preoccupied with biological characteristics, a deficit-based conception of struggling readers that locates the difficulty as uniquely within the reader may also leave teachers feelings impotent. Further, these portrayals leave little space to acknowledge cognitive skills that students do possess, or cultural constructions that affect them, making it difficult for teachers to see students as multi-faceted or as subjected to negative social constructions. Traditional conceptions of students' struggles may limit teachers' understandings to a narrow focus on the struggle without examining the contextual factors that might create or compound that struggle. When confined by this deficit-oriented conception of middle grades' readers struggles, teachers may find themselves out of place in a field dominated by medical or technical jargon. They may feel that they are not prepared, and therefore, not responsible for providing instruction or as though the instruction they provide is severely limited.

*Conceptualizing middle grades struggling readers as having **cultural identities** (where the struggle is seen as a conflict between cultures) places teachers in a position to provide instruction based on engaging readers' funds of knowledge.*

A second conception of struggle in school locates the perceived problem within the larger society. McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne (2006) posit that the discourses of struggle or disability are at work on a cultural level, "embedded in the concerted activities of millions of people engaging in a surveillance system consisting of professionals—doctors, psychologists, lawyers, educators—and parents, all of whom are involved and at the ready before the children show up" (p.13). Students are determined to be successful if they perform the literacy practices valued by school and struggling if they are not. School culture, as a subset of culture at large, determines what tasks are valued and how students are measured in terms of them (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). In this way, "schools actively arrange for some adolescents to take up or inhabit the position of struggling reader" (Alvermann, 2001, p. 683).

Under this conception, school culture functions as the expert. The weight of high-stakes assessments in the current educational climate may make it difficult to distinguish school culture from standardized curricula. While the influence of institutional constructs must be recognized, the role of school culture might be better understood to vary by local construction. McDermott and Varenne (1995) describe culture as "the knowledge that people need for living with each other… crafted from the partial and mutually dependent knowledge … [of] the work they do together" (p. 326). This work may include literacy practices situated locally in classrooms but ultimately shaped historically by the practices and texts that have been privileged in the larger society as well as "the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular context" (Lea & Street, 2006, p.369). Readers may not be engaged in this work because they either do not have access to or do

not value the literacy practices that are narrowly defined in school culture. Moje, Young, Readance, and Moore (2000) further label these disengaged readers as "marginalized … 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 outsiders to the dominant group because of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation" (p.405). While a growing body of qualitative research suggests that many of these "marginalized" readers are deeply engaged in literacies they opt to practice outside of school, this is often accompanied by evidence that these practices are rarely valued or leveraged in the classroom (e.g., Alvermann, 2001; Ma'ayan, 2010; Moje, Ciechanowski, Mcintosh, Kramer, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004).

Teachers may not have full autonomy over the curricula and literacies they promote in their classrooms. They do, however, possess an insider knowledge of school culture that places them in a unique position to mediate students' inclusion or exclusion in school. Teachers may be empowered to leverage their knowledge about and acceptance within school culture to help students navigate potential discrepancies between their own literate practices and school literacies. Teachers might opt to bring in pop culture that relates to students' everyday funds of knowledge (Moje et al., 2004) and materials and curricula that relate to students' cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, 1995). A funds of knowledge approach requires teachers to know a great deal about the literacies and discourses valuable to students outside of school contexts and a willingness to bring these into the classroom. Effectively leveraging students' funds of knowledge may require teachers to think outside of the prescribed literature curricula and expectations for

what students in the middle grades should be reading. Teachers who embrace the tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) may broaden the literacy practices constrained by school culture through incorporating materials that reflect students' identities as well as making those cultural and linguistic identities part of the curriculum. Teachers might leverage these opportunities to offer students access to the discourses of economic power (Delpit, 1995) and a vision of greater opportunity and optimism (Tatum, 2006).

By learning as much as possible about students' cultural and reader identities, teachers can begin to make connections between the discourses students know and the ones that they need to know to be successful in school. Nevertheless, students who appear culturally and linguistically similar to the dominant school culture may also be disengaged from school and marginalized by experiencing difficulty with reading or writing that is valued there. Teachers can work to engage struggling readers by learning about the literacy practices that they feel comfortable with and value and welcoming these practices into the classroom in order to help these students to see themselves as capable readers (Alvermann, 2001). Though "entering the race" of school literacy practices (Alvermann, 2001) is a crucial step, the challenge becomes more complex as students progress through school. For many middle grades readers, there is no longer simply one "school culture" for which students must learn the expectations. This is particularly evident when it comes to literacy practices. The skills that students develop when they are navigating primarily narrative texts in the early elementary grades are not the only literacy skills they need as they move into the middle grades and beyond.

Literacy expectations for readers do not simply increase in volume but begin to vary widely as different text types are introduced in different disciplines. Similarly, multiple teachers in secondary school contexts may demand different identities to be successful in the literacy practices of each classroom (Moje & Dillon, 2006). Moje et al. (2008) posit that "young people in secondary schools are expected to participate in the discourses of the disciplines, to incorporate these discourses into other discourses and identities they experience throughout the secondary school day" (p.111). Without explicit instruction in how to navigate specialized, disciplinary texts or the discourses of the disciplines, it seems not just possible but likely that readers from a variety of backgrounds may "struggle" with learning the ways of each school discipline's discourse, let alone the "metadiscursivity" that Moje et al. (2008, p.112) suggest is required. These academic disciplines, in a sense, function as distinct cultures within a school (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 2001). Complete with distinct kinds of texts and ways to talk about those texts, each discipline has defined the literacy tasks that will be performed and the literacy skills that will be valued. In other words, each discipline has defined a new way for readers to succeed or to struggle. Explicit instruction in disciplinary expectations (Moje et al., 2008; Hall et al., 2011) is necessary for teachers to help students see themselves as successful in navigating multiple school contexts.

It is possible that teachers may also find themselves constrained by aspects of school culture that are heavily entrenched in developmental or disciplinary traditions and feel powerless to help students navigate these discourses. Just as developmentalism has a firm foothold in the way that schools categorize students' growth (Vagle, 2012),

categories related to students' achievement have a complicated history in U.S. public schools. For readers who are identified as having specific learning disabilities related to reading or who are "struggling" or "at-risk" readers, these labels have long been associated with systemic inequities in education (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Ferri & Connor, 2005; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; Reid & Valle, 2004). These labels have also historically been applied inequitably along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. While it is essential to recognize that society and school culture have been responsible for creating categories that have perpetuated inequities and affected groups differently, this does not negate the very real effects that these social constructions can have on individuals within these groups.

Scholars who embrace the culture as disability model inherently focus on the cultural conditions perceived to enable or disable groups of people in general without concern for individual people or students (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). While this model moves toward accepting multiple identities of students and the potential for mismatch between student cultures and school culture, by simply acknowledging disability as a social construction, teachers may not see the true nature of the struggles that their students embody. Instruction for struggling middle grades readers that only addresses cultural differences may not be sufficient to support the skills and strategies that students with reading disabilities may need.

*Conceptualizing middle grades struggling readers as having **multiple identities that may**
include disability positions teachers to provide an answerable education (Vagle, 2010)
for the complex particulars that each individual student brings to class each day.*

A third conception of students' reading struggles extends Brown's (2012)
both/and approach, arguing that "*both* individual *and* social dynamics…operate in young
adolescents' growth and learning" (p.147-148). Conceptions that rely strictly on either
internal or contextual explanations for reading difficulty tend to be dichotomous and
static, suggesting that readers either possess skills and participate in practices or do not,
with no recognition of how this might vary across contexts. Educators who have spent
time with middle grades readers is likely to feel tension with these rigid descriptors and
concur that their reading behaviors vary in "complex" ways (Ivey, 1999) and are affected
by their multi-faceted identities (Hall, 2012). Models that have conceptualized students'
reading difficulties as resulting from an interaction between students' characteristics and
the instruction they receive suggest that these difficulties are fluid or variable by context
(Lipson & Wixson, 1986) and that the students' actions play a role in how disabilities
affect their classroom lives (Coles, 1987). In fact, the learning that occurs in classrooms
may be inseparable from the social identities that are developed there (Wortham, 2004).
While previous researchers have examined this interaction in classroom terms, the
both/and conception goes further to suggest a reader's own identities and abilities may
weigh equally with the influence of social and cultural expectations on the reader's
experience across contexts. When students' struggles with reading are understood to
exist concurrently within individuals as variations in ability and externally as cultural

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constructions, it becomes both more difficult to characterize the type of reader and more important to particularize a specific struggling reader's experience.

By taking up this both/and perspective, the student is uniquely qualified to be the expert of his or her own experience. Vagle (2010) brings Bakhtin's answerable acts and deeds to teaching practices describing a "fluid pedagogy" that depends on a "profound presence" with students (p.124). Vagle (2010) cautions that practices of an answerable education cannot be determined universally, but that they reside in the relations between teachers and students and the ways that they come together to do classroom work. Considering students to be the experts allows teachers to be more open to specific interests, identities, and abilities in a given classroom context.

Unfortunately, this particularizing stance is not often adopted as Bishop (2012) notes that "those most likely to be knowledgeable about their learning needs" are "those historically least likely to be asked" (p.169). Teachers are regularly educated and socialized into a profession where a deprivation or deficit model of struggle is still the dominant discourse. Collins (2013) suggests teachers and teacher educators should learn from the voices and stories of those who have experienced this struggle in school contexts.

The Promise of Positioning Students as Experts

Instead of removing teachers from the conversation, this conception puts teachers in a position where they can truly be responsive, not to generalizations about development or achievement but to individual students' daily experiences. From this empowering position teachers can listen, can differentiate, and can create communities

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for learning. These practices that teachers frequently engage in already can be enhanced by considering how students might be considered experts.

Listening

When middle grades students are positioned as experts of their own experiences as cultural, raced, gendered beings who may experience difficulty with reading in school, teachers can listen. Listening to students' stories with a theoretical understanding of complex embodiment (Siebers, 2008) both raises educators' awareness of the potentially disabling effects of some school environments while also emphasizing that some factors affecting students' struggles are uniquely tied to their own cognitive and academic abilities. Teachers can listen to students read and talk about what they are reading. Teachers can observe the literacies that students value and practice outside of school with their peers, families, and communities as well as those they wish to participate it. Not only will this allow teachers to frame their curricula in terms their students may be more interested and familiar with, it will also allow teachers to see students in terms of their strengths and goals. This echoes a funds of knowledge (Moll, 1995; Moje et al., 2004) approach which is necessary but not sufficient.

It is essential that teachers also listen to students when it comes to the things they are not or believe they are not good at. Students may not always understand the reasons that disability labels are applied to them, but they recognize when they are viewed as deficient and internalize these messages in ways that negatively affect their motivation and self-efficacy. If a student only understands his placement in a support skills class as "because I am dumb," it will be more difficult for him to connect the skills he is learning

to the literacies expected of him in other classes. Labels affect how school personnel, including teachers, see students as well as how students see themselves (Hall, 2009). Some students who try to hide their involvement in special education classes may still consider "LD" part of who they are (Connor, 2008). Others embrace this identity through a "message of sweat and success" suggesting that they understand having a learning disability as a reason to work harder to achieve in school (Brown, 2009). Whether the label is "disability," "at-risk," or "struggling," students may need help to make sense of it. Teachers can utilize subject area expertise to help students articulate what they find challenging and what they are willing to try and what makes them want to give up. This not only empowers students to complicate their own view of what they know and can do, but it will force us to drop oversimplified characterizations of students like "unmotivated" and "lazy."

Coming to understand students who struggle as embodying that struggle, along with various other identities, positions teachers to be answerable to their students and make "determinations of what is appropriate [that] already reside[s] in these relations—not in overarching policies or what is developmentally responsive" (Vagle, 2010, p.122). The real demands of policy will not disappear simply because teachers have decided to put student voices at the forefront, but there is much to gain by allowing student particulars to play a more prominent role in classroom decision-making. By positioning students as "primary knowers" (Auckland, 2007 as cited in Burns & Hall, 2012) teachers and students can collaborate in more meaningful ways where the students are not merely

passive receptacles for curricular content, but fully engaged participants (Burns & Hall, 2012).

Differentiation

Positioning students as experts allows teachers to learn from students and employ a differentiated funds of knowledge approach that truly respects different ways of communicating knowledge. In order to be more responsive to individual needs through instruction that builds on student strengths both academically and culturally, Reid and Valle (2004) invite teachers to consider the meaning of learners' differences in providing instruction rather than working to make accommodations for students to approach the developmental expectations of grade-level curricula. Differentiation in this sense will extend beyond providing two versions of a test or allowing students choice in the medium of a culminating project. The end of the unit is not the only time students will differ from one another; educators may wish to respond to the social, emotional, and academic contingencies that students bring to class each day.

Adopting a both/and perspective of struggle in reading may be particularly useful in the middle grades where English Language Arts teachers face curricular tension between teaching of basic reading skills and teaching of higher-level literary interpretation (Hall et al., 2011). The nominal distinction between elementary "language arts" and secondary "English" classes bears curricular demands that position teachers as addressing either reading skills or interpretation of literature regardless of the very real possibility that students in the middle may need both.

Middle grades students may feel also this tension as they work to meet expectations in all of their courses. Struggles that they experience are likely to vary from context to context and from day to day as many factors affect their learning. Effective differentiation will recognize the many contexts that students must navigate as well as the fluidity of their abilities, identities, and motivation. Not only will all students who struggle not need the same support and skills, individual students may need different kinds of support for different tasks and in different classes to be successful.

Creating Community

Finally, as educators attending to both students' abilities and their multi-faceted identities, we are in a unique position to create a community where differences are embraced. This community might emphasize the inclusion of our students as all of *our* students rather than making distinctions for those who go down the hall to the ESL teacher or go upstairs to the special education room. Many elementary schools utilize flexible grouping practices for reading with students of all ability levels, communicating the message that all students are deserving of specialized attention for what they need, not that this should be a stigmatizing experience. Many Response to Intervention frameworks similarly emphasize providing additional instruction or intervention within the classroom, regardless of student labels. Middle schools rarely employ such methods. When interventions occur, it often means students are excluded or pulled out of the classroom for separate Language Arts or reading intervention classes. At the school level, educators might consider how the academic needs of students might be met while

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also attending to their social and emotional needs of being included in a community of their peers.

By focusing not just on the struggle, but on the context of students' struggles, teachers can be empowered to exercise some degree of control over the immediate classroom contexts that they create for student learning. Teachers could take responsibility for creating classrooms where differences of all kinds are respected and building communities of learners where different ways of knowing are valued (Reid & Valle, 2004). By questioning traditional models of struggle and creating definitions for successful learning that are not seated in developmental benchmarks, teachers can move towards providing educational experiences that are "student centered, authentic, and contingent" (Reid & Valle, 2004, p.474) or answerable (Vagle, 2010).

Conceptions of "struggle" through either traditional or cultural means may lead to differential treatment of students and even avoidance from secondary teachers. Accepting that students may *both* come to school without literacy experiences privileged in schools *and* have skill deficits explained by internal factors, allows both students and teachers to operate not as struggling readers, but rather as developing readers (Hall et al., 2011) participating in the same complex process of lifelong learning. Brown's (2012) "*Both/And Approach* posits that if educators attend to the multiple individual and social relational factors occurring in minute-to-minute classroom time…then a 'routine' educational experience may be transformed into variegated, rigorous, engaging, humanizing inquiry for one and all" (p.157). Ultimately, teachers need to be answerable to the many identities that adolescents bring as members of cultures, as readers, and as

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possibly having a disability. By questioning traditional models of struggle and creating definitions for successful learning not governed by developmental benchmarks, teachers can move towards providing educational experiences that are student-centered and humanizing.

Implications

Teacher education programs in literacy education and special education may help to foster productive beliefs about readers of all abilities by integrating a both/and approach. Bringing multiple perspectives about students into teacher education programs is more likely to develop teachers who are open to students' differences. Instead of maintaining strict divisions between general and special education programs, a both/and approach will foster more fluid, inclusive practices for all teachers. As students may move in and out of special education or tiered intervention programs and classrooms throughout their time in school, it is practical for teachers to be prepared to respond to this fluidity. Teachers embracing a both/and perspective may feel better prepared to teach all students in their classes, regardless of school identifications.

From a theoretical stance, a both/and approach brings together multiple viewpoints, giving scholars better tools to particularize the experiences of struggling readers. Few models exist (e.g. Coles, 1987; Lipson & Wixson, 1986) that attempt to address multiple etiologies for students' struggles. Though helpful, these models fall short by only considering the contexts of academic instruction rather than the many cultural contexts and identities that adolescents move through. This reconception may guide educators toward embracing students' multiple identities and recognizing the

institutional factors influencing these identities that are inevitable part of life and the

practical nature of schooling. Acknowledging this, educators might shake

institutionalized conceptions about categorical labels like adolescence, disability, and

struggling and reconceptualize their students in more particular ways. Reading

difficulties and disabilities do not necessarily present themselves in uniform, static ways.

A both/and conception allows for a more fluid, context-specific understanding of struggle

that may be more useful to students and teachers alike. By positioning students as

"expert" not just of adolescent identities, but rather all aspects of themselves, teachers

will be able to adopt a view of "each student as a person who is in the here and now,

rather than a person who is becoming" (Bishop, 2012, p.166).

CHAPTER 3: Teachers' Constructions of Middle School Literacy Practices

In my previous professional capacity as a middle school reading specialist, I saw students experience success and failure as they moved from classroom to classroom. I felt this unpredictability was indicative of something greater than the presence or absence of literacy skills in discipline-specific genres as I watched students who struggled in sixth grade language arts excel in seventh grade language arts and perform differently in other content classes. While student motivation and other personal relational factors certainly played roles in these experiences, there also seemed to be discernable differences between the texts valued in each classroom and the expectations for how they were used.

Literacy for middle school students is often characterized in public policy by achievement trends on standardized state English Language Arts and other high-stakes Reading tests (Dennis, 2008; Franzak, 2006; Vasudevan, & Campano, 2009). Not only has this discourse painted a population of students who are failing tests and, subsequently, schools that are failing students, it presents a very limited view of what it means to practice literacy in middle school classrooms. Oversimplifying in this way may lead to a "teaching to the test" approach. This narrow view may be framed by curriculum standards, determined by policy makers intending to make educational experiences more similar. While this might be well-intentioned, taking this singular view neglects the hard work and personal investment that many teachers and students contribute to classrooms every day.

A significant body of research is dedicated to the literacy instruction practices of elementary teachers and students. As these same students transition into middle school,

there is reason to believe that the literacy skills demanded of them become more voluminous and more diverse. In secondary grades, literacy may become defined in disciplinary ways, making it vital to investigate "the contexts that directly influence how curriculum is enacted, how classroom culture is constructed, and how pedagogies and assessments are practiced" (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 2001, p.40). Despite the evidence of variable contexts within middle schools, one-dimensional narratives of deficit and failure continue to dominate public policy and discourse when describing middle school literacy and often middle school students.

To gain a more particularized perspective, this study assumes the viewpoint of a middle school student, moving from room to room to every 50 minutes in order to describe the multiple, locally situated literacy practices that occur within a day of sixth grade. To gain insight beyond the dictates of curriculum standards and structures of instructional frameworks, this investigation will explore literacy learning from a sociocultural perspective. Framing classroom happenings with a social practice view of literacy provides insight into literacy practices that are locally situated and teachers' roles in the social construction of those practices. Though secondary literacies are often shaped by disciplinary traditions, in this paper I argue that individual classroom contexts and classroom teachers play a larger role in defining what counts as literacy across the various school contexts students move through.

Theoretical Perspectives

A social practice view of literacy suggests that literacy practices exist "in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of

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properties residing in individuals" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p.8). Understanding

literacy practices as situated in a specific culture and evolving over time (Scribner &

Cole, 1981) allows for inquiry into the ways that social institutions shape and are shaped

by literacy practices. Bringing this perspective to an examination of classroom literacies

expands the understanding that literacies in the classroom can be adequately described as

the product of autonomous skills (Street, 1995).   Practiced within groups and social

institutions, literacy is often, if not always, ideological in nature in that certain ways of

practicing reading and writing are privileged (Street, 1995).

In attempt to make sense of the ways in which acts of reading and writing are

situated in different classrooms, it is important to recognize that these contexts "are rarely

static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiate, resisted, and transformed

moment-by-moment through ongoing work" (Gee, 2000, p.190).   By understanding

literacy as an evolving set of practices that are particular to language as it is used in a

given community (Scribner & Cole, 1981), we may begin to understand literacies as

multiple and situated (Barton, 1991).

Literacy practices have been described simply as "what people do with literacy"

(Barton, 2000, p.7). Practices include observable procedures as well as shared social

understandings of what literacy is and how it is constructed (Barton, 2000). Practices

also incorporate a goal-orientation or socially developed purpose (Scribner & Cole,

1981). While these locally defined literacy practices are situated, they are not static, but

rather "as fluid, dynamic, and changing as the lives and societies of which they are a

part" (Barton, 2000, p.13). These dynamic practices are best understood by observing

and analyzing literacy events, or "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (Heath, 1982, p.50). For the purposes of this study, texts are broadly defined as print media with which students and teachers interact in classroom settings. A single "literacy" is constituted of the different literacy practices that occur within a given instantiation of the institution (i.e. in one school vs. in School).

Domains name the structured social situations or contexts where literacy is learned and used as well as the institutions that support and structure activities within domains (Barton, 2000). Institutions shape literacy through perpetuating ideologies and systems of power (Street, 1995). School literacy is often viewed as dominant over other types of literacy (Barton, 1991; Street, 1995), and within schools, certain practices have historically been valued over others (Heath & Street, 2008). Within individual school disciplines social and political factors play a role in determining the genres that are valued (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 2001).

Related Research

Investigations of local literacy practices are valuable but insufficient without examination of the influences of greater contexts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). In particular, schools are subject to the influence of historical and institutional discourses (Heath & Street, 2008). Here I briefly review some of the trends that are currently relevant in public education, in particular at the site of this study: standards-based curricula, assessment, and intervention. In addition to these public messages, literacy leaders have a wide range of cognitive, affective, and programmatic research to consider in planning

to address the literacy needs of their students (See Roe & Goff for a review). Administrators and teachers in middle schools must make sense of conflicting messages about curriculum standards, assessment trends, and how best to intervene when students do not appear to be learning.

As Franzak (2006) noted, "One of the challenges inherent in developing policy that addresses struggling adolescent readers is the lack of consensus on what constitutes proficiency in reading and what constitutes best practice for promoting proficiency" (p.211). Middle schools, sometimes conceptualized as a bridge between elementary and secondary learning, can be a site of tension between which curricular demands take precedence such as between reading skills and literature analysis in English Language Arts (ELA) classes (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011). By sixth grade reading instruction usually gives way to the content, genres, and practices valued in disciplines though explicit instruction in content area reading is not often addressed (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). As such, middle school curricula can be perceived as standing in the way of providing reading instruction that is responsive to middle grades students (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000).

Working towards the aim of college and career readiness, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) reflect an autonomous skill model of literacy that privilege "traditional and corporate-friendly" literacy practices (Burns, 2012, p.95). Burns (2012) further critiqued commercial interest in a standards-based movement that is at odds with maintaining the professional autonomy of teachers which it claims to support. Though CCSS and other state standards are not intended to be curriculum, they are sometimes

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translated this way in school systems, often with the effect of lessening teachers' autonomy in constructing classroom literacy practices. Continued narrowing of classroom literacy may lead to an autonomous skill model of literacy that perpetuates a singular view of readers as either having or not having skills. Beach, Thein, and Webb (2012) recommend bringing a literacy practices approach to implementing CCSS in ELA classrooms, making space in the curriculum for students' experiences, and connecting "the worlds they live in" to "texts, language practices, and critical issues" (p.6).

Curriculum assumptions about students already having skills (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) are at odds with the interpretations of assessment trends that indicate students are scoring below proficiency expectations (Klenk & Kibby, 2000). Failure on large-scale assessments is often interpreted to indicate students' needs for foundational skill remediation, but individual diagnostic assessment batteries suggest a greater variety of needs (Dennis, 2008). Furthermore, the lens of the testing paradigm perpetuates inequitable treatment of different demographic groups of students, presenting some groups as lacking academic skills, while making other groups largely invisible in policy discussions (Vasudeven & Campano, 2009). This suggests that assessment data needs to be interpreted carefully for both programmatic and individual instructional decisions.

Dennis (2013) found that despite failure on the state reading test, the majority of participants in her study demonstrated mastery of constrained skills (Paris, 2005) and required intervention in the areas of fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In addition to the (questionable) use of foundational literacy skill interventions in middle grades, researchers are expanding study of fluency (e.g., Morris & Gaffney, 2011), investigating

the use of interventions in vocabulary (e..g, Lesaux, Keiffer, Faller, Kelley, 2010), close reading strategies (Fisher & Frey, 2014), reading comprehension strategies (e.g., Vaughn et al., 2011), and reading comprehension in content areas (Vaughn, Swanson, Roberts, Wanzek, Stillman-Spisak, Solis, & Simmons, 2013). (See Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable, Tackett, & Schnakenberg, 2009; Wanzek, Vaughn, Scammacca, Metz, Murray, Roberts, & Danielson, 2013 for syntheses of secondary reading interventions.)

In the above studies, participants and contexts have varied widely, indicating further research in what works, for whom, and in what particular contexts merits further investigation (Klingner & Boardman, 2011). To aid practitioners, Fischer and Ivey (2006) offered criteria for evaluating secondary reading interventions, including key implementation factors such as teacher involvement and motivating, authentic reading and writing opportunities aimed toward engaging students in more and better reading.

School-wide systems of intervention are less well-established at the middle school level than they are at the elementary level and experts suggest, need to take fundamentally different approaches to be effective (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010). In proposing a three-tier RTI model for the middle school level, Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) first emphasized the need for teachers from all content areas to participate in school-wide improvement of vocabulary and comprehension instruction across content areas through ongoing, embedded professional development.

A Locally Situated, Social Practice View of Middle School Literacies

Klingner and Boardman (2011) recommended taking a contextualized view of intervention work, and I concur. It is also necessary to consider the contexts of other

literacies, as they are practiced in schools by teachers and students, and to consider the ways that they may adopt and challenge the institutional influences that may contribute to or detract from student success. Heath and Street (2008) explained the literacy practices of academic disciplines as "varied practices associated with different communities" wherein students utilize different writing styles and genres and negotiate social meanings and identities in each classroom setting (p.105).

Lewis (2001) illustrated the ways that social and cultural contexts affected read aloud, peer-led literature discussions, teacher-led literature discussions, and independent reading classroom practices in a fifth/sixth grade classroom. This focus on the discourses and norms of these practices, contributed to a view of sociocultural learning that includes identity, agency, and power (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). Other ethnographic inquiries into middle schools have shed great light on the social ways young people have used literacy practices, both in and outside of the classroom (e.g., Finders, 1997; Ha'ayan, 2012). The present study seeks to explore the ways that teachers draw upon the influence of historical and local institutions as they design the literacy practices located within their classrooms.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Recognizing the role of both local and historical influences, the purpose of this study is to examine the texts, the social practices related to their use, and the literacy skills that are subsequently deemed important in one middle school setting. Through description of literacy practices observed and teachers' construction of them, I describe, analyze, and interpret how teachers and administrators locally make sense of standards-

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based curriculum, assessment, and intervention trends as well as other topics relevant to this school and faculty. The following questions guide this work:

1. What do classroom literacy practices look like in the sixth grade classrooms in this study?

2. How do teachers participate in constructing these practices? What is their reasoning behind structuring lessons as they do?

Method

Study Design

In order to describe the varied literacies situated locally in these middle school classrooms, I utilized ethnographic methods to develop a description of classroom literacy practices observed in each classroom context. Ethnographic methods were appropriate for elucidating the phenomena I sought to study because they "provide critical understandings of language and literacy *in situ*" (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p.92). Ethnographic methods are well-suited for studying social practices of literacy (Heath & Street, 2008) and academic literacies (Lea & Street, 2006). Within the field of education, these methods have been used to document literacies that students use both inside the classroom (e.g. Dillon, O'Brien, & Volkmann, 2001; Lewis, 2001) and outside of it (e.g. Heath, 1983; Ma'ayan, 2012; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

The classroom literacy practices described here are part of a larger study using case study design (Yin, 2014). Case studies can be useful for exploration, description, and explanation of a selected case (Yin, 2014). Their use of multiple data sources to

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make sense of complex situations and potential for application to real life make case studies indispensable to literacy research (Barone, 2004). In order to gain authentic perspective into how middle grades students experience daily literacy practices, rather than a global, abstract view of the school domain of literacy, I chose to define a case that is a "concrete manifestation" of a "real-life phenomenon" (Yin, 2014, p.34). Here, the phenomenon I sought to shed light on was the multiplicity of literacy demands represented by a sixth grade student's academic schedule.

Setting

Highland Middle School (all location and participant names are pseudonyms) is a grade 6-8 school, the only middle school in a suburban district adjacent to a mid-sized, urban Midwestern city. Just over 900 students come together at HMS from four different elementary schools including one STEM school, one dual language school, and two traditional programs. According to the State Report card (accessed 1/5/15), the demographic composition of the school mirrors that of the school district and the larger community with 39.2% Hispanic or Latino students, 27% White students, 24.2% Black students, 7.3% Asian students, and 2.3 % American Indian students. Just over 19% of students at HMS receive special education services and nearly 35% receive English Learner services. Over 70% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, a larger percentage than the overall district. Like many other schools in the state, Highland Middle School has observed a significant gap between the academic achievement of White students and their non-White peers.

Academic achievement at Highland Middle School is a great concern. Less than 50% of students score "proficient" on the state English Language Arts end of year test; in 2014, this was 42.3% compared to the state average of 58.8% (State Report Card, accessed 1/5/15). Over the past five years, Highland's scores had consistently been more than twenty percentage points below state averages; however, since the implementation of new reading standards in 2013, school-wide proficiency has narrowed this interval notably. District graduation rates have also increased significantly from 2010 (46.2%) to 73.6% (2013).

The master schedule at HMS places students in seven instructional periods or "hours" a day, each lasting fifty minutes. Students receive instruction in the four core areas of language arts, social studies, science, and math each day. The other three hours they are assigned exploratory classes including subjects such as choir, art, and physical education. These courses may last a quarter or longer and students may rotate through several in a school year. Some students also received academic support classes through general education, special education, and English as a Second Language courses.

Participants

Teachers were identified for participation in this study in two ways. First, school administration worked with the three sixth-grade level teams to determine which team of core teachers would be most interested in participating. Then, as two struggling readers on that selected team were identified as participants in a larger study, other teachers who worked with these students in providing academic support were invited to participate. Overall, nine teachers and one administrator were interviewed for this study. These HMS

educators ranged in overall professional educational experience and varied from being in their first year of teaching at HMS to working more than twenty years at the school.

Highland Middle School utilizes a middle school teaming approach where four teachers work together to teach one-third of the sixth grade students. Teachers on each team meet weekly to discuss student concerns; teachers also meet weekly by department (grades 6-8) and with other grade level teachers by discipline. On the Gold Team, Ms. Paula Miller, Mr. Harold Stanford, Ms. Pam Tompkins, and Ms. Sandy Monahan taught the core subjects language arts, social studies, science, and math respectively. While interesting literacy events were observed in Ms. Monahan's math class, the class was structured in a partially flipped instruction model where students were expected to watch instructional video outside of class. Because this placed much content outside the scope of this inquiry, in this paper, I will focus on the literacies of the language arts, social studies, and science classes.

Data Sources

Participant observations and field notes.

I spent more than 150 hours at Highland Middle School over the course of six months becoming acquainted with school culture, personnel, and reading support services. Some of that time was spent volunteering in a general education reading intervention class. There, I mostly participated as the teachers directed me, often taking small groups of one to three students to another space to read. Though I positioned myself as more of an observer in other classroom spaces, because of their familiarity with me in the reading class, some students approached me as more of a participant.

In the fifth month, my data collection entered an intensive daily observation phase totaling more than 50 class periods in a two week period. This intensive data collection period allowed me to see each class four - nine times as well as observe instructional units in most classes from beginning to end. While at the school (or in the field) I jotted scratch notes which I reviewed daily and supplemented my "head notes" to form more fully developed "field notes proper" (Sanjek, 1990). I drafted conceptual memos occasionally in the field and more often when reviewing notes later. Theoretical sampling lead to a narrowed focus on the texts that became key concepts in these classroom practices as they were recognized as central to teachers' and students' interactions. Follow up observations and member checks occurred in following weeks.

Artifact collection.

During observations, some text artifacts were collected, particularly various worksheets as they were distributed to students. When I was able to collect a text and review it while it was being used in the classroom, it provided greater insight into exactly how the text was mediating the observable literacy events. Some text artifacts were collected after the fact and used in initial stages of analysis to clarify observational notes from the field. Along with these classroom texts, a copy of a student's grade report was obtained (with parental permission) and used to understand how the teachers had organized assignments in their gradebooks. This aided later stages of analysis by showing how the patterns of literacy practices that I determined compared with the instructional categories that teachers determined.

Interviews.

To supplement the observational data, a secondary data collection included structured ethnographic interviews with teachers (see Teacher Interview Guide, Appendix A). Teachers meet Spradley's (1979) criteria for good informants as they are well enculturated in their schools as well as currently involved. Teacher interviews lasted 20 – 45 minutes and occurred following the bulk of the observations. This allowed observational data to drive the identification of interview topics and modification of interview protocols. As I gained insight about key classroom texts and the overall school culture, I was able to tailor some questions to each teacher about specific literacy practices that I observed in their classrooms. This served to elicit their input on my initial interpretations as well as provide information about how literacies are constructed in this context.

Data Analysis

Utilizing ethnographic methods to learn about classroom literacies suggests a need to adopt a constant comparative perspective in order to compare what is observed to existing, theoretical perspectives (Heath & Street, 2008). To this end, I analyzed data using constant comparative analysis strategies to compare initial analysis with new data as it was collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the initial transformation of scratch notes to field notes proper (described above) I read through observational notes in order, each day, to determine sensitizing concepts, in particular to determine key texts for future observation and interview focus. I identified texts as significant in each classroom context as I observed them playing central roles in teacher and student interactions,

relying on Heath's (1982) definition of literacy events as "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (p.50). Usually the ways that classroom participants interacted around text appeared to align with how the teacher planned it but sometimes it did not. At several points during the observation period I read through and retyped my field notes for a single class, cross-referencing text artifacts collected and writing memos about key texts and observed literacy events that appeared important to the literacy practices of that class. It was important to my analysis that I moved back and forth between this subject-specific analysis and considering literacies in a temporal, day-to-day fashion in order to consider both the ways that teachers planned for practices to be carried out and the ways that students experienced them. I also reviewed and transcribed teacher interviews during this time period. This provided me with additional questions that I sought to answer through my observations.

Following the collection of all data, I worked to reduce data into tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) focused on literacy events organized chronologically (see Appendix B for Sample Data Table of Literacy Practices). Using open and axial coding recursively, I identified types of texts and the ways in which they were used in order to solidify my understanding of the literacy events I had observed. Using Scribner and Cole's (1981) description that a practice is a "recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities" and "socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks" (p.236), I began to identify patterned ways that texts were being used towards the goals of each classroom. As I regrouped the coded events into a table

organized by practices, I included data and notes from the teacher interviews to confirm and extend my preliminary patterns. The perspective of the teachers permitted me insight into some of the more social aspects (e.g. task design, goals, and purposes) for the literacy events I observed. As I grouped events, this guided my analysis more than the text type or event interaction.

For each class I created a taxonomy diagram in order to conceptualize the relationships between observed events, recognized practices, and the literacies that I theorized them to be components of. Through recursively working to connect observational data, concepts from the literature, and my own hunches (Heath & Street, 2008), I considered teachers' words as representations of their conceptions of literacies performed in their classes along with curricular standards and other established instructional material to attempt categorizations of literacies within courses. This preliminary analysis extends beyond the scope of this study but is noted here to explain its inclusion in the diagrams shared below.

Finally, I looked at literacy texts, events, and practices across classes. When I observed similarities in texts or text structures I revisited the data with an eye on the social ways in which the text was expected to be used as well as how it actually mediated interactions within each class. This allowed me to more clearly see how elements of literacy that appeared common were still uniquely situated in their classroom context.

Findings

To answer my first research question "What do classroom literacy practices look like in the sixth grade classrooms in this study?" I felt that it was important to view these

practices as the students do each day: in a long string of short bursts. Specifically, as

Highland Middle School students moved from classroom to classroom, they were asked

to interact with a variety of texts in a variety of ways. By presenting a glimpse of each

classroom context back-to-back I hope to illustrate the quantity of these interactions even

when the text itself may not be voluminous. Within these descriptions I will embed the

teachers' words to illustrate their perspectives in shaping their classroom literacy

practices.

For each of the three core classes that represent the focus of this paper, the

findings presented here will first offer a brief description of the classroom and relevant

texts to provide some understanding of the classroom context in which literacy

experiences are situated. Then I will offer a holistic view of the literacy practices

drawing on both my observation of patterns of literacy events and the teachers'

descriptions of how they constructed literacy practices. Next, a diagram example of this

classification system is included in order to illustrate relationships between observed

events, understood practices, and theorized literacies. Finally, I will illustrate the

classroom literacy practices through sharing the literacy events observed on a single day.

March 17, 2015 was chosen as the day for this focus because all teachers were present,

few students were absent, and it was early enough in the instructional unit for each class

that more class time was dedicated to instruction rather than independent practice or

project work. The literacy events observed during this day and presented here appeared

to be part of ongoing social practices of literacy as variants of them occurred on other

days as well. Following these descriptions, I summarize what teachers have explained about their students and how it relates to the observed practices.

Though the analysis of texts is not the focus of this study, texts undoubtedly played an integral part in this work. Classrooms on the Gold Team at HMS are encircled by text. Commercially-made posters, visual aids, and diagrams are joined by teacher-made instructional materials such as word walls and bulletin boards. Student work also adorns the walls of most rooms, adding color and a personal touch. Each classroom boasted a classroom library of trade books, geared toward young adult readers, on shelves alongside textbooks and other reference texts. Many classroom materials were labeled and posters suggesting academic language prompts were common.

In addition to this multitude of generally static environmental texts, each classroom was full of texts that were displayed for briefer periods of time, added to or manipulated, and used interactively during classroom instruction. Teachers regularly used document cameras, LCD projectors, and Smart Boards to share texts with the class including presentation slides, video clips, and assignment models. Consistently across classrooms, text, often handwritten on the white board, was used to convey the Essential Questions, Learning Targets, and Language Objectives of the lesson or unit of study (*Understanding by Design,* Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). From this vast ocean of text, I narrowed my focus to the texts that were immediately relevant to the work students and teachers were doing. Texts that were rarely, if at all, explicitly used (e.g. posters, classroom library novels, reference materials) remained in the environment of the classrooms but were not necessarily called on in the literacy events that I observed.

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Language Arts

Ms. Miller's classroom library was definitely the largest on the Gold Team and students' use of it is supplemented by trips to the school media center. Shelves in one corner of the room hosted anthologies and grammar textbooks. Posters around the room clarified the use of easily confused terms (e.g. to/too/two, they're/their, etc.), suggested conversation prompts (e.g. "In my opinion…," "How is ___ like ___?," etc.) and the 4L's of how to work in groups (e.g. "Look at your partner," etc.). A particularly large teacher-created poster included an image of a winding road with a note reminding students not to forget to "Notice and Note" with two signposts illustrated referencing a strategy that had become popular among language arts teachers at HMS (Beers & Probst, 2013). White board space was utilized to display daily Essential Questions, Learning Targets, and Language Outcomes, a calendar, a homework assignment board, and a running list of students who have yet to turn in the most recent essay. Ms. Miller also had a large chart pad on a wheeled easel that she brought forward to create shared texts with the class. Other important texts were shared through slide presentations projected onto the Smart Board and papers projected using a document camera. Students often recorded notes from these presentations in a guided note-taking format referred to as "Cornell Notes." These guides were glued into interactive language arts notebooks known as "ILANs" alongside student-generated brainstorms; the ILANs were stored in a milk crate at the back of the classroom.

Ms. Miller emphatically described instructional units in sixth grade Language Arts as "guided by state standards" and delivered through the Reading and Writing

Workshop model (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). Ms. Miller described the literacy work her class did in terms of the workshop lesson structures such as warm-up, mini-lesson, guided practice, independent practice, and closure. This model was new to HMS this year; Ms. Miller cautioned, "we haven't had a ton of training" and seemed uncertain about the basis of this model beyond the lesson structure (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). In my analysis of the teacher and students' interactions around text, I developed categories of literacy practices that often aligned with these lesson structures but did not always.

The diagram below (Figure 2.1) as well as the others that follow will illustrate my classification of the literacy events observed in the class on the focal day (March 17, 2015) in relation to literacy practices and larger literacies in the class as they are located within the school domain of literacy.
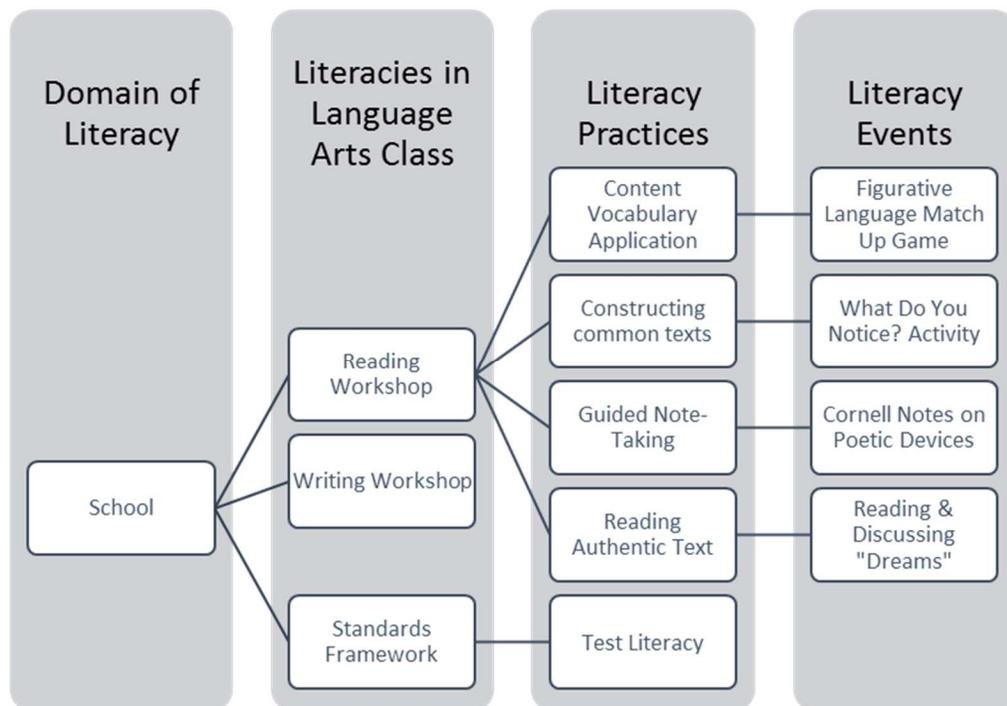
Figure 2.1. Taxonomy of literacy events in Ms. Miller's language arts class.

Content Vocabulary Application. Within the parameters of the standards-based curriculum and workshop model, Ms. Miller sought to include what she considered "good teaching strategies for middle school" such as "using movements" which she encouraged by playing music while students walked around the room and "partnering, letting them talk" by providing opportunities to interact with the material and with one another (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). These interactive moments most often occurred during the warm-up part of the lesson, in events I observed to be a part of the literacy practice I labeled Content Vocabulary Application. For the Match Up Game, observed on this focal day, the teacher first projected a slide with activity directions. Students were to draw small slips of paper either naming a figurative language device (introduced the previous day) or defining one. In describing these short texts, the teacher referred to both at times as "examples" and quickly recognized the confusion this caused. To clarify she gave the remainder of the directions throughout the activity by referring each by the shape of the paper as either square (terms) or rectangle (definitions). Another text central to this activity was a poster that Ms. Miller had created three copies of and hung on three sides of the room that morning. These posters included language prompts for the activity or as she directed "examples of how your conversations will go" (field notes, 3/17/15). Students were meant to choose a partner so that between the pair there was one term and one definition, have the conversation scripted by the poster, and then, when prompted, switch to carry on the same conversation with a new partner who had a different term or definition. Both the slips of paper and the posters mediated students' interactions during this event, but not consistently as the teacher had intended. As students grouped together,

some read the text from their partner's slips silently and determined whether they had a matching term and definition or not, skipping or abbreviating the poster conversation. Others utilized the poster prompts as intended in this first round but then went looking for someone holding the match to their own slips when instructed to switch. The teacher shared that she had intended this activity to be an opportunity for students to verbally rehearse the new terms, "they had to actually speak because I wanted them to use those words. That's really important or they're not going to know them" (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). But students appeared to have a different objective for the literacy that they practiced in this activity, to create pairs with matching terms and definitions. Literacy events observed on other days to be a part of the Content Vocabulary Application practice included watching a video of someone reciting a poem ("Minstrel Man" by Langston Hughes) in order to identify the author's tone in the poem along with the reader's mood and illustrating an idiom literally (e.g. A drawing of a man underwater standing next to a large fishing hook labeled "Off the Hook").

Constructing Common Texts. Ms. Miller frequently utilized the chart paper in a literacy practice I labeled Constructing Common Texts that she would categorize as part of her mini-lesson, intended to activate students' prior knowledge. She indicated that this was an important part of how she envisioned the workshop model, "I do try to get them to think about prior knowledge. I feel that's very important... Trying to get them to do as much of the work as possible is this model that we're looking at." (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). In the "What Do You Notice?" activity students were asked to look at a poetry collection selected from a basket of four to five books at each table first independently

and then within their small table groups of three or four students. Students were not

tasked with reading the poetry, but rather jotting down notes about what they

remembered from learning about poetry in the past. Ms. Miller solicited observations

about poems from students (e.g., "There are no rules," "They don't always make sense")

and scribed them in marker on the anchor chart while discussing them. This chart, as

well as others similarly co-constructed, were referred to in subsequent lessons when

relevant.

 Guided Note-Taking. The bulk of Ms. Miller's mini-lessons followed a pattern

of literacy practice that I labeled Guided Note-Taking. Ms. Miller chose the Cornell

Notes format specifically because she believed it to be used school-wide as part of the

schools Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program and believed this

consistency was important to students. During events that exemplified this practice, Ms.

Miller projected a slideshow onto the Smart Board and students were given a typed

guided note template with the names of poetic devices in one column next to examples

and definitions with one or two words missing from each. Students were asked to

complete the Cornell Notes while the teacher read from and explained the slides, "what

that means is filling in the missing words" (field notes, 3/16/15). At the end of these

mini-lessons, Ms. Miller modeled writing a summary statement at the bottom of the notes

while holding her own notes page under the document camera so that students could copy

it. At no point did I observe students contributing to this statement or being instructed to

review their notes to generate key terms or questions as the Cornell Notes strategy was

actually designed to be used (Pauk & Owens, 2005).

Reading Authentic Texts. In the midst of this mini-lesson was a brief event that I observed and categorized as being part of the literacy practice of Reading Authentic Texts. I categorized texts as "authentic" if they were published by authors for purposes outside of classroom, making them the types of texts that readers might encounter in authentic or non-school contexts for reading (e.g., stories, novels, magazines). Ms. Miller embedded the full texts of Langston Hughes' poem "Dreams" and e. e. cummings' poem "maggie and millie and molly and may" in her presentation slides. This event stood out from the rest of the presentation as a separate event because both the type of text and the way students were being asked to interact with it was different. After reading "Dreams" aloud twice, as she indicated poems were meant to be read, Ms. Miller asked students to talk at their tables about what it meant. Many students contributed to these brief small group discussions. On other days, students were asked to analyze poetry included in a photocopied "poetry packet" by highlighting verses and labeling a stanzas. Events in which students were asked to read and respond to authentic literature were few and far between during my observations. Earlier in the school year, class activities had been organized around the novel *The Birchbark House* (Erdrich, 1999), but regular work with literature was not consistently observed to be part of this course.

Test Literacy. No events related to the literacy practice of Test Literacy were observed on this day. By test literacy I mean events that are a part of the language arts literacy that I have labeled Standards Framework. Ms. Miller's efforts to infuse the content of the curricular standards into the workshop model are readily apparent; however, there were exceptions where the standards framework seemed to trump the

workshop model and test literacy work was a class activity that did not fit into this structure. Ms. Miller appeared to have some tension with this. She referred to test preparation activities as things that she "had" to do and referred to the workshop model as being something new that they were trying with "not a ton of training"(Miller, Interview, 3/23/15).

Other Literacy Practices. Other literacies were a part of Ms. Miller's ELA class as events were observed that appeared to connect to something greater but did not fit into any of the literacy practice categories analyzed here. Artifacts of Writing Workshop practices (e.g., cover sheet for student research essay, list of names of those missing the assignment) were both observable and referenced though no indication as how these brief events connected to common practices was observed.

In summary, the literacies practiced in Ms. Miller's language arts class were heavily influenced by the content of the state curriculum standards and the structure of a Reading Workshop model. Ms. Miller believed that middle school students needed opportunities to learn socially and provided students opportunities to talk with each other in small groups to generate shared background knowledge and practice new content vocabulary terms. Extended interactions with authentic literature and composition were suggested though not observed during this time.

Social Studies

The sixth grade social studies curriculum was focused on state history. Environmental texts in Mr.Stanford's classroom reflected this focus with several maps showing state features at different points in the past as well as a large fabric state flag.

Classrooms walls also boasted primary sources of different genres including replicas of text and photographs. White board space was utilized to display the unit's Essential Questions and frequently updated Learning Targets. One shelf held outdated textbooks and classroom supplies. Near the door there was a wheeled cart holding a class set of iPads. Unlike the other technology carts that were shared throughout the school, this cart remained in Mr. Stanford's room through an arrangement he negotiated to pilot an e-textbook app designed by the State Historical Society. Students accessed the textbook *Northern Lights* (MHS, 2014) through this app as well as participating in interactive review games and taking vocabulary quizzes on the iPad. Students also kept interactive notebooks in this class which were added to or used as a reference nearly every day. Students glued vocabulary sheets and map outlines in to these notebooks but also wrote and drew in response to course content. Mr. Stanford maintained his own copy of this Interactive Social Studies Notebook (ISN) which he modeled using through interactive features of the Smart Board. After handwriting items using the designated markers on the board, he returned to the computer at his desk to "clean these up" by turning them into typed text to display (field notes, 3/18/15). Mr. Stanford also used the interactive features of the board for vocabulary review and video activities.

Mr. Stanford admitted that he and some of his colleagues were at first "panicked" when the new curricular standards requiring a full year of state history were instated the previous year (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). After teaching the content for a year, taking advantage of resources from the State Historical Society, and participating in professional conferences related to integrating standards-based instruction, he was

confident that they had designed meaningful curriculum and identified supportive

supplemental resources for drawing students in to what he frequently referred to as "The

Story." Mr. Stanford also explained that he saw literacy work in social studies class (see

Figure 2.2 below) as a support of the literacy tested in language arts. He maintained this

viewpoint, citing work with vocabulary and response to questions on study guides as

"reinforcement" of literacy skills (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). He also noted teachers'

hesitation at this idea initially before recognizing, "you're right we are looking a

vocabulary. We are looking a primary and secondary resources… how can we do that

better? How can we expand on that?" (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15).
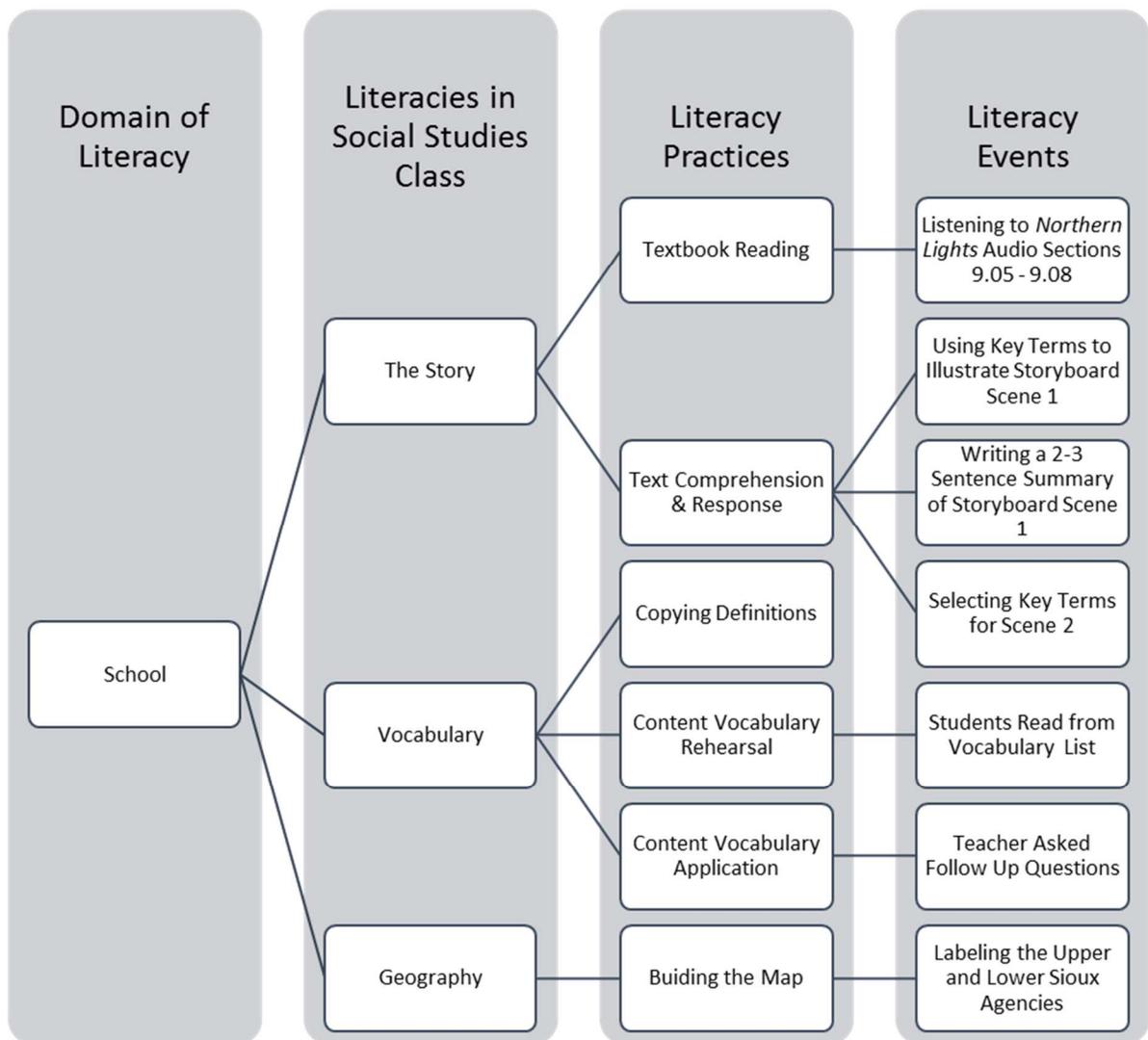
Figure 2.2. Taxonomy of literacy events in Mr. Stanford's social studies class.

Textbook Reading. As previously noted, students accessed the social studies

textbook through an iPad app when in class. They also were able to get paper copies in

booklets when they needed to bring short sections of the text home to complete

assignments. During the literacy event observed on this focal day, like most episodes of

Textbook Reading, the "reading" was done as a whole group and students took turns

volunteering to have their iPad "speakers" read the text aloud. Mr. Stanford viewed this

as a great affordance of the iPads as he believed his students needed to have texts read aloud:

> If you want them to understand the text, if you want them to comprehend, you've got to read it with them or really have to break it down with serious questions. I typically will read it with them and these [picks up iPad] are so nice now. You've seen, the iPads, they're so nice because it reads it out loud. As much as I like to read out loud, reading aloud for five hours [laughs and gestures at his throat] it gets hard. (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15).

Even with the support of technology, Mr. Stanford took some opportunities to read sections of the text himself, particularly to emphasize emotionally charged content. "I feel like I always… if I need them to understand that trader Andrew Myrick was *so* evil, I feel like I have to read it to them" (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). During the observed events of Textbook Reading, Mr. Stanford paused the group between each section to talk about what was happening and clarified key points. At the end of the reading on this day, several students volunteered comments that reflected insight as well as connections to previous learning. One student commented that in the conflict between the Farm and Traditional Dakota siblings might be fighting with each other. Another made the analogy that the situation might be like the North and South in the U.S. Civil War (Field Notes, 3/17/15).

Text Comprehension and Response. Mr. Stanford asked students to demonstrate comprehension of and respond to text in several ways. In addition to the paraphrasing he modeled during the reading, he engaged students in a project to create a

storyboard of five scenes that would represent The Story of the Dakota War. This project was somewhat unique to this unit as it took the place of the unit test as a summative assignment; however, similar multimodal texts incorporating visuals and text (e.g. graphic organizers, illustrated timelines) were observed in students' ISNs.

To begin this project, students participated in several literacy events observed to be part of the practice Text Comprehension and Response. For each scene, the class worked together to identify key terms from a section of the text. Then students individually selected and illustrated one of those terms and wrote a brief summary statement to explain the illustration. Due to the on-going nature of this project, on the focal day, each of these steps was observed, although seemingly out of order. First, Mr. Stanford projected his copy of the ISN showing the terms that he had modeled generating for the students the previous day. He asked students to think about which words stood out to them and solicited from them an explanation of why these terms (e.g., hungry, mad) were important to the scene. With this preparation, he gave the students time to draw scenes in pencil in their ISNs. Following this he instructed students to make the word they had chosen the title for their drawing and asked them to write two to three sentences explaining the picture underneath it. He explained that this was "So that if [the principal] walked in, all he would need to do is read the sentences to know what is going on" in their illustrations (Field Notes, 3/17/15). The task required for the first observed literacy event, drawing the scene, was heavily modeled and scaffolded; the task required for the second event, writing a brief summary, was not. Following the next section of Textbook Reading (described above) students were engaged in a whole group brainstorm

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to select important words from the text as well as key words that described how they believed the Dakota might have felt. These terms were recorded on Mr. Stanford's model ISN for use the next day.

Content Vocabulary Rehearsal and Application. Vocabulary was a core literacy in Mr. Stanford's Social Studies class and for the first week of a new unit, it was practiced in various ways Monday through Thursday and quizzed on Friday. He referred to these each of these brief daily activities as a "sprinkle" emphasizing that he liked to give students repeated exposure to the content vocabulary (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). The majority of these "sprinkles" also connected vocabulary to the context of The Story of the unit. On this focal day I observed the Tuesday routine, an activity referred to simply as "vocab review" that included two literacy events, each representing a different literacy practice. The words introduced the previous day were projected onto the Smart Board. First, students volunteered to read a word and its definition aloud, directly from the lists they had glued into their ISNs. When he believed it was warranted, Mr. Stanford prepared the students by asking them to practice pronouncing the words with him (e.g., internment camp, refugee). In this literacy event, the board and notebook text provided a script which selected students repeated aloud. Because of the formulaic nature of this interaction, I labeled the corresponding literacy practice Content Vocabulary Rehearsal. Immediately following the repetition of definitions, Mr. Stanford engaged students in less formal conversation requiring them to apply their understanding of the terms with questions such as, "Is an internment camp somewhere you want to go?" and statements like "I wonder who is going to be exiled…" leading students to make predictions about

how the vocabulary words would connect to the content they are learning (field notes, 3/17/15). He viewed this as previewing the content they have yet to read, "With the vocab on Tuesdays I will hint to them, 'Hey, this is what we're going to encounter. That is what we're going to encounter.' I like to build them up" (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). This briefer event was an example of the Content Vocabulary Application practice as well as something Mr. Stanford believed to strengthen students. The students' vocabulary lists were still helpful in mediating this interaction, but no longer provided the full text of their responses. Instead it provided information that they must combine with their own background knowledge to deepen their understanding of the content vocabulary terms.

Building the Map. In parallel to the events occurring in the texts they read, students were guided to add details to a map glued into their ISNs. On the previous day, students were oriented to the map and reviewed the placement of key geographic features such as rivers. During the literacy event observed on this focal day, students used a map on the textbook app to identify the Lower Sioux Agency and the Upper Sioux Agency. As students were doing this, Mr. Stanford reminded them of the role of these agencies in the Dakota story and drew their attention to a small replica photograph of an agency building posted on the classroom wall, integrating an additional, primary source.

In summary, the literacy of "The Story" played an important role in social studies; the parallel literacies of Vocabulary and Geography even contributed to this as students practiced vocabulary terms and added details to their maps in the context of The Story. Mr. Stanford led many of the whole group practices asking students to summarize key

ideas and make connections through guided verbal questions throughout. Students had

extensive opportunities to make personal meaning of the textbook that they listened to

and read through composing multimodal responses in their interactive notebooks.

Science

Immediately to the left of the entrance of Ms. Tompkins' science room was a

large word wall made of printed vocabulary terms organized alphabetically on a light

blue patterned background. Several commercially made posters featured cartoonish

illustrations of laboratory expectations. White board space on one wall was used to

display Essential Questions for the unit under the header "What's the Big Idea?". On the

opposite wall a white board displayed a month-long calendar of daily class topics. The

walls were lined with large built-in wooden cabinets of all sizes and often labeled with

their contents. The room was larger than most standard classroom spaces and is arranged

as two distinct spaces divided by the Smart Board (placed in front of a support beam) and

the teacher's desks. Much of class happened in the back half of the room, at the students'

black lab tables.

Ms. Tompkins described science as a "vocabulary-driven" subject and suggested

that literacy skills "can be a hindrance to a lot of kids… if they don't come with the

tools" (Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15). The textbook, a thin, soft-covered workbook style

volume of the *Interactive Science* series (Buckley, Miller, Padilla, Thorton, & Wysession,

2011) does not appear to play a large role in the literacy practices of this class (see Figure

2.3 below). Ms. Tompkins recognized that the textbook was "very challenging"

(Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15); at times when she believed it to be "too technical" for

students, she directed them to use the pictures as a resource (Field Notes, 3/24/15). On

other occasions, she supplemented the textbook with videos on similar content which

students used to fill out Vocabulary Quiz worksheets (field notes, 3/26/15; 3/27/15).

According to Ms. Tompkins, lab activities often involved a lot of writing: making a

prediction, creating a table and graph to represent data, answering questions, and writing

a conclusion. Other lab activities, like the Marble Roll project (described in part below)

are more hands-on and involve "creativity" (interview, 3/24/15). All labs were guided by

packets of text that varied in length and opportunities to respond but were generally

structured around the steps of the scientific process. These lab packets along with

numerous other worksheets were glued into students' Interactive Science Notebooks

(ISNs) which were collected once a quarter for a grade.
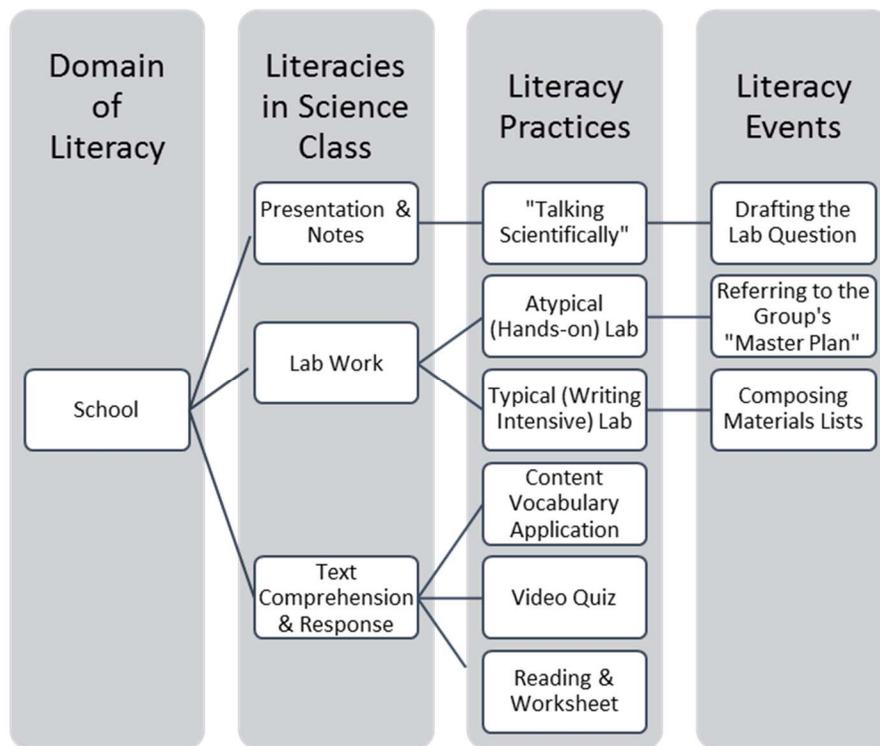
Figure 2.3. Taxonomy of literacy events in Ms. Tompkins' science class.

"Talking Scientifically". Ms. Tompkins liked to "talk scientifically" to the students to support their vocabulary development (Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15). During the literacy event observed on this focal day, this type of talk occurred while she was coaching the group to write the question that would guide their Marble Roll lab. After prompting students for ideas of how to phrase the question, Ms. Tompkins pressed for more specific, scientific language and offered support to students by spelling words aloud.

Tompkins: "How… can… we…"

Student: "make obstacles"

Tompkins: "What's the d-word? I like the d-word."

Student: "Design?"

Tompkins: "How can we design a Course? Course is spelled C-o-u-r-s-e… How can we design a course… what else?" (Field Notes, 3/17/15)

Ms. Tompkins used this type of modeling to elicit a question that indicated the goal of this lab was to design a course that would keep a marble on a sloped board for the longest period of time.

Atypical Lab. I categorized several of the literacy events that I observed during this unit as Atypical Lab practices based on Ms. Tompkins' insistence that in most other labs, students were expected to do more writing. Looking only at the text of the lab packet, this distinction was not clear. When observing the text in use, however, students were not directed to complete certain portions of the work as she indicated, "we skipped a lot of the prediction part of it" (Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15), a direction that she did

not clearly articulate to the class as she had to reprimand some students when she noticed

they were completing the packets in their small groups (Field Notes, 3/17/15; 3/19/15).

One text that did play an integral role in this Atypical Lab practice was the "Master Plan"

that each group of students had collaboratively constructed the previous day. Students

were observed to use these labeled diagrams in a limited fashion as they worked together

to write the "shopping list" of materials needed to build their board as well as

intermittently once beginning to apply the materials to the board. While this text was

visible on all group tables, in many cases it quickly became displaced by the materials

students were using to construct their courses. Within groups, students occasionally

referenced this text to provide direction and draw each other back to the task when they

did not agree with what other group members were doing (Field Notes, 3/17/15).

Typical Lab. Despite the Marble Roll being uncharacteristic in a number of

ways, some of the literacy events observed during this week-long activity matched with

practices students were expected to carry out in Typical Lab work. On the focal day,

students were directed to work together in their self-selected small groups to compose a

"shopping list" of materials they would need to execute the design they had planned

(Field Notes, 3/17/15). This type of work was confirmed to be common lab practice by

comparison to the work students did in the "Bounce" Lab the following week (field

notes, 3/26/15). As students each wrote a list of materials in their own packets, they

communicated about how many of each item they anticipated needing, using words and

holding up fingers to communicate numbers. The collaboration around this list became

more important as only one individual from each group was allowed to go to the cart to

obtain materials. The list became a way to operationalize the group's plan. After the original sets of materials were obtained and students began to work with them, some groups were observed to update their lists to reflect what they were finding to be useful.

It is possible that the two lab-related literacy practices that I have categorized here are simply variations of a larger literacy related to lab work in this class. Literacy practices might better be understood as the type of work students needed to do (e.g. write a question, make a prediction, record data, etc.); however, Ms. Tompkins appeared to categorize the Marble Roll activity differently than other labs in several ways. In addition to the amount of writing required, Ms. Tompkins also categorized this activity differently in her grade book; it was recorded as a performance assessment and graded based on their participation, not completion of the packet, unlike other labs. This may be an illustration of the ways in which practices develop and change over time and with use. Through many years of using this lab assignment, Ms. Tompkins had modified it to be a primarily hands-on assignment with fewer written components; however, this modification may have been unclear to students doing the assignment for the first time and trying to complete it as they had learned to complete other lab assignments.

Text Comprehension and Response. Apart from lab activities, students were expected to make sense of a significant amount of content independently. As previously noted, students were not expected to read the textbook though it was used as a resource for answering questions and coming up with their own examples of concepts (field notes 3/24/15; 3/26/15). Conversely, students were expected to independently read the most recent issue of *Science* World and complete a two-sided comprehension worksheet

independently although the topics did not relate to the current unit of study (Field Notes, 3/24/15). Ms. Tompkins did not offer any explanation for how this text fit in to the class in terms of content or literacy practices. Though some students required multiple class periods to complete the thirty questions, they did so without question suggesting this might be a monthly even upon receipt of each new issue.

Extended videos (30-45 min.) were used to convey unit content, in particular Ms. Tompkins noted to supplement or take the place of the textbook (Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15). Before starting the videos, Ms. Tompkins prompted students to read through the questions independently. In one instance, she indicated a new term that students would learn during the video (Field Notes, 3/27/15). Students were to document key terms and responses to ten questions on video quizzes independently while watching each video one time (Field Notes 3/26/15; 3/27/15).

In summary, the genre of lab packets and the structure of the scientific process shaped a lot of the literacy practices in science. Though students often completed the lab application activities in small groups of four or five, they were often expected to write conclusions independently. Much of the content comprehension also happened independently as students completed quizzes on content presented in videos or magazine articles. Ms. Tompkins believed these supplementary texts were more accessible to students than the course textbook. Content vocabulary was modeled verbally through personal stories though not visually available for students' reference.

"These Kids": An Analysis of Teachers' Knowledge of their Students and Planning Instruction on the Gold Team

Across these three classes, teachers planned scaffolding into their practices to support the perceived needs of readers. The videos that Ms. Tompkins showed in science were one way that she attempted to account for the student needs that she perceived in her classes. As she believed the vocabulary of the science content to "hinder" many students, and the textbook to be poorly suited to their literacy skills, she provided multiple opportunities for students to watch different videos relaying content and learn collaboratively through doing labs.

Similarly, Mr. Stanford discussed reading text aloud for students to comprehend and structuring assignments like the context clues vocabulary sheet because he believed the students needed this additional support to learn the content. Speaking from more than ten years of experience teaching at HMS, he explained, "every year I get a feel of these kids, where they're at" and suggested that if he were in another district without the diversity and poverty of HMS, he would rethink the assignment (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). Currently in the context of HMS he knew the "GTers [gifted and talented students] fly through it" and acknowledged that, with more time teaching the curriculum, he would like to offer more differentiated assignments (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15).

Ms. Miller also structured assignments, like the Cornell Notes, with students' needs in mind. Specifically, she mentioned that the fill-in or guided model of the note sheets was something she intended to lessen the writing requirement for the two sections

of her class that had many EL students and were co-taught with the ESL teacher. Ms. Miller used these same Cornell Notes formats for all of her classes.

In fact, each of the practices that teachers indicated was meant to support the perceived needs of students was utilized universally for all students. Though teachers considered the academic needs of their students in designing literacy experiences for the classroom, it was unclear upon what information they drew upon to construct their knowledge of students. Without mentioning either standardized or formative assessment data, there seemed to be a consensus that the 6th graders on the Gold Team were not independently proficient readers and that they needed assignments structured to allow them alternative ways to access the content. Despite the acknowledged diversity at HMS, Gold Team teachers planned their instruction in response to a singular view of the student population.

It is worth examining these accommodations or modifications provided for all students for the differing amount of support they offered students and literacy skills that they still required. Like the social studies text, many texts were read aloud to students on the Gold Team. Of the examples teachers provided as designed to address students' needs, only the science video quizzes and social studies context clues sheet required students to read varied amounts of text without the teachers support. Of these three examples, the language arts Cornell Notes were heavily scaffolded and modeled by the teacher, the social studies Context Clues sheet allowed students to work in pairs, and the science video quiz was independent. The differing social manners of completing these

tasks also affected the ease or difficulty that students had accessing the content and completing the assignments.

Discussion

It is important to note that the 2014-2015 school year was a time of great transition in the Highland district, with administrative changes requiring a great deal of adjustment in how teachers' non-teaching time was scheduled. In the interest of respecting teachers' time, school administration restricted my access to only one interview with each. This limited time impacted the amount and type of access I had to classroom and the observations I was allowed to undertake. In addition, because of other school schedule issues, the daily observation period was also more limited than originally intended. To account for this in my dissertation, I have only reported on patterns where the data reached saturation. Thus, other literacies and practices were indicated (e.g. Writing Workshop in language arts) but not fully explored and analyzed.

What do classroom literacy practices look like in the sixth grade classrooms in this study?

Looking Across Classroom Contexts.

With the many literacy events and practices that students participated in during this single day in mind, there were undoubtedly elements that appeared common to multiple classes but were distinctly situated. As "literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices" (Barton, 2000, p.12), it is critical to consider how texts are used to advance the goals of participants in each classroom. Moving from one classroom to the next, many texts and text structures

appeared similar, but it was the less readily observable social usages and purposes that distinguish practices where students may feel successful and eager to participate from those where they will not.

The teachers at Highland Middle School explained their instructional choices in terms of what they believed to be best practices to meet their students' needs. Teachers consistently used white board space to reflect the school-wide expectations of displaying Essential Questions and Learning Targets but were less uniform in their talk about or references to these organizing texts. Teachers engaged students with the content by inviting them to respond by creating multimodal texts, representing their learning through images and words. In many ways, literacy practices revolved around common these text structures and strategies that teachers chose to be supportive of students.

One example that initially appeared consistent was the use of interactive notebooks. All three teachers expected students to use these tools to store important papers and provided specific directions about how to organize them. On closer inspection, the notebooks differed in physical appearance and more notably, use. In language arts, the ILANs were thinner, folder-type books used for the construction of informal brainstorms and the collections of more carefully structured Cornell Notes. The norms of use for these notebooks included their storage in the back to the classroom. These notebooks were not intended to be utilized as resources for students outside of class. In social studies, students did not add every sheet they receive to their ISNs; some worksheets, like those for viewing videos are stored in their binders. The pieces that were included in the ISNs were referred to frequently and often modified after their initial

introduction. For example, students were asked to add new details to a map every day or two as they learned about new geographical features through their readings. Students also drew pictures and completed graphic organizers in this space as a way of making more personal meaning of the text. The vocabulary lists were used daily as students completed review exercises and were instructed to bring this home to study for the vocabulary quiz. The science ISN was the largest of the three notebooks; many students ended up carrying this notebook separately as it did not fit neatly into the large binders they carried. While it had roughly the same number of pages as the Social Studies notebook, many pages had folded, multi-page packets glued in, expanding them. In the context of science class, the notebook was used as a tool to keep students' papers organized and collected at the end of the quarter to hold them accountable.

Another apparent similarity was all three teachers' emphasis on vocabulary; however, what "vocabulary" meant and how it was integrated into literacy practices in the classroom varied notably. Terms that I refer to as "content vocabulary," or what Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) categorize as Tier 3 words were taught explicitly in both language arts and in social studies class. These words were central to interactive classroom activities and contextualized in authentic ways in both classes. In language arts they fit within the established structure of Cornell Notes and in social studies they were central to the weekly routine. In science, this content vocabulary instruction was embedded in videos which often provide multiple exposures. Students' work on the related quizzes did not indicate that the terms are being mastered and few opportunities were observed in which students practiced using the vocabulary in other ways.

When interviewed, both Ms. Miller and Ms. Tompkins specified a necessary knowledge of roots and affixes when they were talking about "vocabulary." Ms. Tompkins indicated this was a prerequisite for learning to "talk like scientists" (Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15) but did not elaborate on where it did or should come from. As a member of the school literacy committee, Ms. Miller was instrumental in hanging posters around the building with common Latin roots and examples of their derivatives and organizing a school-wide interactive quiz game of these. She also noted this type of vocabulary instruction as a focus for an intervention class she taught but it was neither mentioned nor observed in conjunction with the Language Arts class.

Few Texts and Many Practices

In an era of standards and rhetoric demanding increased rigor, it is important to note the very modest amount of print text students actually read and wrote during this focal day and throughout the overall observation period. In teachers' efforts to offer all students the support that they believed necessary, teachers scaffolded "reading" text interactions by abbreviating the amount of text read, reading the text aloud, and replacing reading with video instruction. Teachers designed "writing" text interactions to be limited to filling in word blanks, drawing and labeling, and generating lists. Looking only at the print texts that students consumed and produced, it was possible for a student to proceed successfully through a school day without independently reading or writing more than a single sentence of connected text. Further, the majority of texts were limited to one use, potentially limiting students' opportunities to engage with them (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Despite the meager volume of print text students were expected to interact with, multiple genres were presented through several media. The tasks that teachers wanted them to perform as well as the socially "correct" ways of performing them varied greatly from classroom to classroom as well as changing within a class from one assignment to the next, sometimes in unarticulated ways. While the texts in use were not necessarily complex, the socially developed practices for interacting with them were. From a broader perspective, all of these practices might be categorized as within the domain of school literacy (Barton, 2000); however, from a student-level perspective, a single day in sixth grade requires nimble navigation of nuanced literacy practices. Fourteen events are detailed within this paper from three classes; this was just a slice of one student's day. Texts may have been superficially similar, but teachers' interpretations of their students and larger contextual factors resulted in varied social practices, required students to have metadiscursive skills (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008) to be successful across contexts.

How do teachers participate in constructing these practices? What is their reasoning behind structuring lessons as they do?

In the observed classrooms, teachers played powerful roles in determining what literacy practices would look like and students' roles were limited to following the social expectations laid out for them by the teacher rather than contributing to the practices in a more substantial way. It should be noted that many classroom practices allowed opportunities for students to interact with the teacher and with one another. In social studies this included students sharing questions about and connections between different

historical events that they recalled learning about earlier in the year. In science, this included students' opportunity to design their own Marble Roll course in small groups of their choosing. In language arts, students talked at their tables to collectively activate their background knowledge about poetry terminology before sharing with the whole class. These are just a few examples of the ways that students' interactions contribute to a larger text or understanding of the content.

Curriculum Standards

Recognition of the teachers' strong position in constructing these literacies, along with the acknowledged limits of local accounts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002) suggests the need for closer examination of the ways that larger institutional influences affect the day to day classroom literacy practices. Teachers in all three of the classrooms analyzed in this dissertation noted the centrality of curriculum standards in what they do. The standards, and particularly changes in them, were noted by teachers as challenges and opportunities to rethink the content and format of instructional units. Standards also played a role in the language of the classrooms, frequently displayed in the wording of Learning Targets which some teachers used to invite students to self-evaluate their learning of the day's lesson.

Assessment Trends

Messages from developmental models about what middle grades students *should* know about literacy conflict with messages from high-stakes assessments that stress what students do *not* know. The Gold Team teachers at Highland Middle School appear to interpret the fact that nearly half of their students (46.5%) did not reach proficiency

benchmarks state standards at the end of their fifth grade year to mean that content needed to be presented verbally either through texts read aloud or videos. Instead of referencing this or other assessment data, teachers' evaluations of what their students could do appeared to be more related to their tacit knowledge of what students at HMS were like on the whole. Concerns about individual students raised in team meetings and conversations with administrators and counselors revolved around students' behaviors and failing grades. Student learning may have been discussed in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) but these contexts were not observed and rarely referenced by the teachers themselves.

While giving great respect to teachers' expertise of their contexts and their students, this "accommodations for all" mentality, as displayed by the overuse of particular reading strategies and the lack of apparent differentiation for gifted as well as struggling readers, caused me to question the way that teachers might be more reliant on generalizations about who their students were rather than their own assessments of student learning.

The Influence of Local Institutions

Beyond the historical institutional influences common to schooled literacy (Heath & Street, 2008), literacy practices inside the classrooms at HMS were also shaped by institutional values specific to the district and the school itself. These can be seen in aspects of the school structure and pedagogical practices.

Collaboration

The practice of teaming, popular in middle schools, was deemed an important part of the school's culture and reinforced through mandated collaboration, multiple times a week. Teachers' collaboration on the Gold Team had varied implications for the literacies observed in these three classrooms. While teachers met weekly to discuss student concerns and upcoming events that would affect the common schedule such as field trips and testing, it appeared that their discussion of instruction was reserved for collaboration with other teachers of the same subject through weekly grade level and departmental (grades 6-8) meetings. The absence of cross-discipline conversations was apparent through examination of classroom literacy practices. Each teacher independently disclosed to me that a writing-intensive unit had been concluded prior to my observation period in the form of a biographical research essay about a Civil Rights leader, a test-based essay telling The Story of an important person in the Civil War, and a lengthy lab report conclusion. Evidence of these extended writing tasks were still recognizable in the classroom environments, students' work, and grade books. Despite their close collaboration in working with students on the Gold Team through personal and behavioral challenges, it appeared that there was minimal intentional collaboration to stagger large writing assignments or structure them in a manner where they could build upon one another. Following these tasks, each teacher also decided to give students a break from the intensity of this writing, leaving students with little work in composing extended text. It should also be noted that collaboration was limited to team and disciplinary departments and rarely extended across departments.

Mandates from local school administration also affected the structures of literacy practices visible through classroom events. One example of this was the recent implementation of the Reading and Writing Workshop model in language arts classes and the newly created "Tier" classes. This model was selected for its flexibility to incorporate interventions, particularly in the Tier class where intervention, provided by students' core teachers and targeted to their needs was the focus. It was unclear what the influence of this mandate was on actual literacy pedagogy as neither intervention materials, curricula, nor progress monitoring measures had yet been identified. This raises questions about the way data were being used to make instructional decisions and the ways that students with ostensibly different needs were being accounted for in the general education curriculum. Making more space for classes that might be categorized as Tier 2 interventions does not necessarily address issues with curriculum or materials in general education, Tier 1 settings.

Professional Learning

As some details of literacy reform were established by Highland administrators, more variables depended on teachers' involvement with various professional learning activities. Starting this year, all teachers were required to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs). The school leadership team set a school-wide goal of addressing reading achievement and tasked PLCs with determining a relevant way to address this through the creation of common formative assessments. The teachers included in this study did not mention their PLC work, so it is unclear the effect that this had on observed classroom literacy practices. Some self-selected professional

development opportunities had more discernable effects on the classroom. For example, the Highland District offered after school courses for professional learning to its teachers. Some teachers elected to attend literacy-related courses on Reading Workshop and specific reading strategies that they implemented immediately in their classrooms. Another teacher noted the support gained by participating in a state department of education-sponsored conference on integrating literacy into content standards-based instruction. In many ways, the discourses of standardized curriculum and of achievement as measured by high-stakes standardized tests did affect the format and structures of literacies evident in Highland Middle School while actual "test preparation" activities were limited.

Conclusions

While many structures were in place for teachers to collaborate in support of student literacy learning, it is possible that like students' many experiences with classroom literacy practices, teachers found this multitude overwhelming. The work that teachers were expected to do in disciplinary departments, disciplinary grade-level teams, instructional teams, PLCs and as whole group of sixth grade teachers overlapped, but not completely, suggesting that teachers must also work to navigate the social norms of participation in these contexts. In addition, the largely unacknowledged work Gold Team teachers do with co-teachers from the English as a Second Language and Special Education department, intervention specialists, counselors, and other non-teaching support personnel is rarely accounted for in the daily schedule and therefore, sometimes does not happen. Time spent communicating with students and their families is another

unscheduled time commitment. As schools like Highland seek to re-structure to affect positive change for their students' literacy learning, they would benefit from close examination of how these mandated structures actually facilitate the work that they aim to do effectively and efficiently and where instead they might inadvertently fracture more coherent, organic communities of educators driven by a common goal of serving students.

While the goal of helping students to be successful with literacy practices might be a universal one, this does not mean that literacy practices should look the same across the day. Though navigating multiple practices might present a challenge to new middle school students, it is a worthwhile challenge. Explicit instruction in the literacy expectations of disciplines, though often neglected, is necessary (Hall et al., 2011; Moje et al., 2008). Work with different genres of reading, writing, and speaking can only enhance students' skills and critical engagement with text. Learning how literacy practices might relate to topics and even careers in different areas of interest provides an authentic and motivating purpose for middle school students to invest themselves in their own education. As teachers explore the connections across their classroom contexts they may actively work to create connections for students, not just rely on common structures. They can then work constructively to build students' skills and knowledge in the reading and writing practices that they deem relevant to their disciplines rather than replacing them the listening and viewing practices that may leave students more passive participants in the classroom. Teachers can also work to make social cues more visible to help students navigate the many literacy practices present in a day of sixth grade.

CHAPTER 4: Struggling Readers Learning to Navigate Sixth Grade Literacies

"The reading we do now… it's way different than we did in fifth grade" -Lauren

Traditional understandings of reading difficulties and disabilities often use autonomous skill assessment benchmarks to label some middle grades students as "struggling," "at-risk," or "disabled." Current trends in high-stakes testing perpetuate these categorizations and a singular view of students who struggle, suggesting that they may experience universal failure in school (Dennis, 2008; Franzak, 2006; Vasudevan, & Campano, 2009). This static view does little to recognize the complexity of middle grades students' reading experiences and behaviors as they shift from year to year, class to class, and day to day.

In contrast, middle school students, including those who have been identified as "struggling" in some capacity have been shown to engage in variable and complex literacy practices (Ivey, 1999). This view of readers is consistent with my own professional experiences as a special education teacher and reading specialist in New Jersey schools. Middle school readers interacted with texts, teachers, and peers differently in different contexts. These literacy events were not the isolated application of skills or absence of them but more nuanced expressions of social identities adopted or refused by their participation in classroom practices.

This case study brings together differing perspectives on students identified as having reading difficulties and reading disabilities through general and special education processes in one middle school. By foregrounding the voices of the students themselves, I present students' perspectives and allow my observations and teachers' perspectives to

confirm, contradict, and complicate them. Students shared several core teachers; however, based on their distinct identifications, each student was scheduled different academic support classes which constructed literacy practices differently. I detail the ways that the construction of these students' difficulties intersects with the construction of different literacy practices in each classroom to illustrate what reading disability and difficulty mean for two students in one middle school.

Theoretical Perspectives

A social practice view of literacy informs this research by suggesting that literacy practices exist "in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p.8). Understanding literacy practices as situated in a specific culture and evolving over time (Scribner & Cole, 1981) allows for inquiry into the ways that social institutions shape and are shaped by literacy practices. Bringing this perspective to an examination of classroom literacies expands the understanding that literacies in the classroom cannot be adequately described as the product of autonomous skills (Street, 1995). Practiced within groups and social institutions, literacy is often, if not always, ideological in nature (Street, 1995). Despite common institutional influences, it is important to recognize that classroom contexts "are rarely static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiate, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing work" (Gee, 2000, p.190). Understanding classroom literacies as multiple and situated (Barton, 1991) creates opportunity to employ a sociocultural understanding of literacy and learning that

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"offers theoretical and methodological tools to study human development" (Artiles, 1998, p.35).

These theoretical perspectives are extraordinarily valuable when investigating multi-faceted issues like reading difficulties where at the individual level, a student might be experiencing school failure because of reading difficulty, at the interpersonal level, a student's reading difficulties may be related to mismatches in cultural expectations, and at the institutional level, schools may be failing students that have or are at risk of developing reading disabilities. Conceiving of literacy as a set of social practices suggests that it is not sufficient to study texts alone or an individual's performance of a limited range of literacy tasks, but that the use of literacy within the social group should be observed in literacy events (Heath, 1982) and analyzed in terms of practices. As these are shaped by and specific to a culture, ethnographic methods are best suited to this inquiry (Heath & Street, 2008).

A view of sociocultural theory that includes identity, agency, and power (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007) provides an avenue to investigate what institutionally-influenced and locally-defined practices mean to the individuals involved and what it means for them to participate in these practices. Students and teachers may work together in the classroom but are also members of their additional communities of practices where participation is a way to denote the level of one's membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991). How students view themselves is likely to affect how they choose to participate in classroom literacy practices. In this study, students were invited to describe their own participation in order to highlight some of the identities they enacted in the classrooms.

Recognizing that the way identity is conceptualized has repercussions for literacy research (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009), this study is guided by my understanding of identities, as they are negotiated and constructed through social interaction and through degrees of participation. Consistent with Moje et al.'s (2009) description, I view identities as fluid, "enactments of self in activity, with the self always changing but also retaining histories of participation that shape how the self acts- that is how, it takes on or resists identities- in various relationships or contexts" (p.418). It is possible for identities to be assigned by these relationships or contexts and adopted without question. This perspective of identities informs my understanding of the participants in this study and their participation in local literacy practices.

Critical perspectives from Disability Studies in Education contribute the perspective that "disability" is one potentially long-lasting identity that students may be labeled with or take up (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Siebers, 2008). Dudley-Marling (2004) suggests the "complex identity" of learning disability requires interaction in the school environment to perform (p.485); these interactions may position "struggling readers" to take up similar identities. The performance of this identity requires cultural standards, opportunities to demonstrate meeting those standards in the right time and place, the presence of people who perform the tasks well, and the presence of people granted the authority to determine if standards were met (Dudley-Marling, 2004), suggesting that disability is a cultural construction, dependent on specific contexts. Learning contexts may include events, places, social groups, realms of knowledge, or moments in time that are important for understanding the ways that learners make sense of literacy practices

(Moje, Dillon, and O'Brien, 2000). Similarly, "the underlying structure and values of school literacy are built into definitions of struggling readers" (Franzak, 2006, p. 219) indicating the way that students are identified as individuals with reading difficulties or reading disabilities is about more than just the skills they do or do not have.

Related Research

Franzak (2006) argued that too often students are placed into support classes or interventions based on "the assumption that students performing poorly on high-stakes assessments of reading have not yet developed the necessary skills for functioning at a particular grade level" (p. 214). Despite their wide usage, standards-based assessments are not necessarily valuable tools for making instructional decisions for individual students (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Rupp & Lesaux, 2006). These decisions may be further misguided by assumptions that all students scoring below benchmarks require foundational skill instruction and incorrectly prescribe interventions accordingly (Dennis, 2008; Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010). Administrators and teachers who rely on only these assessments are limited by these decontextualized categorizations of students and their abilities.

Readers' Varied Skills

Despite the prevalence of generalizing views of students who exhibit difficulty with school reading, empirical studies establish the variation in students' skills. Through a variety of assessments and methodologies, researchers have determined that these students are not a monolithic category, but instead that they display a variety of profiles (Catts, Hogan, & Fey, 2003; Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2002), some of which emerge after

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students have successfully progressed beyond third grade (Catts, Compton, Tomblin, & Bridges, 2012; Leach, Scarborough, & Rescorla, 2003). Dennis (2013) established similar profiles with middle school students who had experienced reading failure. Lesaux and Kieffer's (2010) work with sixth grade Language Minority (LM) students suggested that LM students also demonstrated multiple profiles, not necessarily a distinct LM category. Further, they established that struggling readers who were classified as LM and their native English speaking peers shared trends in low general vocabulary and semantic working memory (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010).

Readers' Identities as Learners

Attempting to understand readers through test scores and grades is insufficient without consideration of their identities. Wortham (2004) asserted that learning content in classrooms was inextricable from the development and maintenance social identities influenced by both socio-historical and local factors. Students identities in the classroom are both enacted by choice as well as in response to identities that they are assigned or those that are demanded of them to be successful (Moje, & Dillon, 2006). While students who struggle with reading may have a tendency to avoid it and "hide" in the classroom (Brozo, 1990), O'Brien, Springs, and Stith (2001) found that students reluctant to participate in schoolwork willingly engaged in activities that helped them "construct and affirm social identities" (p.115). Literacy practices also shape social roles for students; the roles they assume reciprocally enable and constrain students' participation in literacy practices (Finders, 1997; Ma'ayan, 2012).

Readers' identities play an important role in establishing how they participate in classroom practices, including how they use reading strategies, discuss texts, and interact with peers (Hall, 2012). Students learn what it means to be identified as a certain type of reader from teachers, peers, and parents (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). Struggling readers may not feel they can or should take on the identities required in their classes to be considered successful (Moje & Dillon, 2006). Identities linked with past experiences of failure may lead students to choose to disengage or engage in behaviors viewed negatively by teachers as a type of resistance to demanded identities or as a way of maintaining chosen identities. Students who may be interested in learning and becoming better readers are often hesitant to ask for help or practice strategies if they feel it puts them at a greater disadvantage in terms of being embarrassed in front of peers or feeling further behind them (Hall, 2007).

Students are often identified for reading support in elementary school based on the practices and assessments used in that context. Many of those elements change when students enter middle school, but students' identifications are not necessarily re-examined for what they mean in these new contexts. When transitioning to middle school, students are asked to navigate multiple discourse communities in a school day (Moje & Sutherland, 2003) and become "enculturated into membership in different disciplinary communities at the same time that they learn content concepts" (Moje & Dillon, 2006, p.89) for the first time. The cultures of these disciplines play an important role in secondary schools (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, (2001).

The Use of Case Study Methods to Understand Middle School Readers

Case study methodology has been used effectively to illustrate the multifaceted ways that middle school readers bring varied reading skills and identities to literacy practices. This method has been valuable for exploring the complexity of middle school readers (Ivey, 1999), interactions between teachers and struggling readers (Hall, 2009), and less commonly, a reflection on the experience of having learning disabilities (Johnston, 1985). By examining the cases of eight middle school struggling readers through three theoretical lenses, Dressman, Wilder, and Connor (2005) concluded that multiple factors had contributed to the failure that students had experienced in school. Deeming exclusively cognitive, sociocultural, and macrostructural explanations of students' reading failure to be insufficient, they came to view "struggle as a network of multiple life paths generated by multiple conditions that combine and produce interactions" in students' lives (Dressman, Wilder, & Connor, 2005, p.56). Advocating a multi-perspective approach to present a comprehensive view of students, Dressman, Wilder, and Connor (2005) called for more case study research to integrate different perspectives to inform pragmatic program reform.

One perspective Dressman and colleagues drew up was that of the students themselves. Other case study research has shown that middle school struggling readers have been able to share their own perspectives of deficits in their previous reading instruction and the stress that reading causes them as contributing factors in their lack of reading progress (Kos, 1991).

Dillon (1989), Ivey (1999), and Hall (2007) provided a missing link in the research. They found that struggling readers may present differing identities and skills across general education secondary classroom contexts. These researchers had participants Learned (2014) expanded upon this work with an in-depth exploration of several ninth grade struggling readers and some of their classmates as they moved across classroom contexts and interacted with different teachers, confirming that indeed, students experienced difficulty differently in different contexts.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to extend the aforementioned work with students experiencing multiple contexts for the first time at the beginning of their middle school careers. Specifically, the case study that follows draws on multiple possible explanations for students' reading difficulties and integrates different types of data to illustrate these. It also builds on the perspective that students' academic skills and social identities both play a role in their school experiences, and that similarly skill-related and social norms play a role in creating school identifications for readers. To that end, this work includes general education struggling readers and also students identified with reading-related Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) reading and special education class contexts which have previously not been examined in this manner.

Research Questions

1. What do classroom literacy practices look like for the two sixth grade students identified as "struggling readers" in this study?

2. How do these students participate in the practices? What are their perspectives about the different literacy practices they encounter in school?

3. How do school identifications of reading difficulties and reading disabilities apply to students in different classroom contexts?

Methods

Research Design

In order to describe the varied literacies students participate in throughout their school days, I utilized a case study design (Yin, 2014). In this study, two individual students, sixth graders who have experienced difficulty with reading, are identified as cases (see participant selection criteria below). The boundaries of each case include all classes, all teachers, and all practices associated with the student's prescribed class schedule as they would experience it in a single day. By examining students' experiences across contexts, I was able to observe the breadth of students' experiences along with all of the teachers and peers these youth interacted with. Despite their potential to be richly informative (e.g. Finders, 1997), I excluded primarily social times such as lunch and hallway passing times. In addition to these temporal boundaries, I bounded the case spatially within classrooms in the school building. Specifically, when teachers assigned online videos for homework, I observed this as it was included in class, but exclude detailed analysis of students' participation in these media outside of class. By defining case boundedness as previous researchers have (Yin, 2014), my focus on individual students (e.g. Hall, 2009; Ivey, 1999) situates this study amidst existing research.

Each case is constructed using ethnographic methods to best describe the literacy practices in each classroom context. Ethnographic observations and interviews "provide critical understandings of language and literacy *in situ*" (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p.92), and are well-suited for studying social practices of literacy (Heath & Street, 2008) and academic literacies (Lea & Street, 2006). These methods have been used to document literacies that students use both inside the classroom (e.g. Dillon, O'Brien, & Volkmann, 2001; Lewis, 2001) and outside of it (e.g. Heath, 1983; Ma'ayan, 2012; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

Setting. Highland Middle School or HMS (all names are pseudonyms) serves approximately 900 students in grades 6-8 as the only middle school in this suburban district. The student population at HMS is diverse, reported on the state report card as approximately 39% Hispanic or Latino, 27% White, 24 % Black, 7% Asian, and 2% American Indian (State Report Card accessed 1/5/15). Over 70% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, a larger percentage than the overall district. Like many other schools in the state, Highland Middle School has observed a significant gap between the academic achievement of White students and their non-White peers.

Academic achievement at Highland Middle School is a great concern. Generally fewer than 50% of students score "proficient" on the state English Language Arts end of year test; in 2014, this was 42.3% compared to the state average of 58.8% (State Report Card accessed 1/5/15). Over the past five years, Highland's scores had consistently been more than twenty percentage points below state averages; however, since the implementation of new reading standards in 2013, school-wide proficiency has narrowed

this interval notably. District graduation rates have also increased significantly from 2010 (46.2%) to 2013 (73.6%).

The master schedule at Highland Middle School placed students in seven instructional periods or "hours" each day, lasting fifty minutes each. HMS utilizes a middle school teaming model where four teachers work together to teach one-third of the grade six students. Teachers on each team met weekly to discuss student concerns; teachers also met weekly by department (grades 6-8) and with other grade level teachers by discipline. For the other three hours students are assigned exploratory classes including subjects such as choir, art, and physical education. These courses may last a quarter or longer and students may rotate through several in a school year. Some students also received academic support classes during these periods.

HMS offers a host of programs to support students through general education interventions, special education services, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. While some classes were co-taught with general education teachers, specialists in these departments are not otherwise included in team planning or meetings. Students who were placed in academic support classes were placed according to schedule demands rather than team divisions; schedule demands further necessitate classes sometimes being composed of students from more than one grade level.

Selection Criteria.

I used purposeful sampling to select students who would be able to provide "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p.232). As it was important to the goals of this study to understand how the constructs of "having a learning disability in reading" and

"struggling in reading" were operationalized in this school setting, I enlisted the help of knowledgeable school personnel in helping me identify students that met local criteria for these labels. With this insider knowledge, I utilized operational-construct sampling to find "real world examples" of students with reading difficulties and disabilities as they are defined in this context (Patton, 2002).

When I began work at Highland Middle School, I was informed that students could either access reading and writing support services through special education service classes or through one general education intervention class. School personnel confirmed that students in these classes would be considered to have disabilities or difficulties related to reading, respectively so to meet my first criterion, participants should be selected from these class lists. The assistant principal assigned to sixth grade, Ms. Wendy Alonzo, determined that the students would need to be on the Gold Team as the Gold Team teachers were the only ones able to participate. The additional student selection criteria I provided her were intentionally general to allow consideration of a wide variety of learners. I asked for students who would be willing and able to talk to me about their experiences with reading and school whose families would give permission for them to participate and stay after school to talk with me. Ms. Alonzo selected two students she had known since she taught them in elementary school; she believed they would be open to this and could benefit from any additional support I could offer.

Participants

Lauren was a twelve-year-old Latina student in the sixth grade at Highland Middle School. She had always gone to school in the Highland community, previously

attending Mt. Philips Elementary School from kindergarten through grade five. Lauren's

mother communicated with the school in both Spanish and English, but Lauren only

spoke English at school. She was a Language Minority (LM) learner though she did not

share anything about her own proficiency in speaking, reading, or writing Spanish.

During her sixth grade year, Lauren received reading interventions in the General

Education Reading Intervention (GERI) class. For the purposes of this study she was a

student the school identified as a student with reading difficulties or as a "struggling

reader."

Mason was a twelve-year-old Latino student in the sixth grade at Highland

Middle School. After attending kindergarten at a charter school in a nearby city, he

attended Mt. Philips Elementary School in grades one through three before transferring to

Memorial Elementary School for fourth and fifth grade. Mason was a Language

Minority (LM) learner who almost exclusively spoke English at school and sometimes

helped his Spanish-speaking mother interpret for appointments at school and within the

community. During his sixth grade year, Mason received some language support as an

English Learner (EL) in a section of Academic Language Preparation (ALP). He also

received special education services through a Special Education Language Arts (SELA)

class focused on his IEP reading goals and a Special Education School Strategies (SESS)

class focused on his IEP writing goals. For the purposes of this study he was a student

the school identified as a student with a specific learning disability in reading.

All academic teachers who worked with Lauren and Mason were invited to

participate in this study including four Gold Team teachers, two general education

reading interventionists, two special education teachers, and one ESL teacher. On the Gold Team, Ms. Paula Miller, Mr. Harold Stanford, Ms. Pam Tompkins, and Ms. Sandy Monahan taught the core subjects language arts, social studies, science, and math respectively. Ms. Sara Madison and Ms. Hannah Linden co-taught the General Education Reading Intervention class. Ms. Maya Kendall taught sixth and seventh grade students in a Special Education School Strategies class, geared towards instructing students in support of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) writing goals; Ms. Vanessa Ritter taught sixth grade students in a similar resource setting Special Education Language Arts class where she addresses reading goals more directly. Ms. Martha Nash taught sixth and seventh grade students in an ESL class for the most proficient students, Academic Language Preparation (ALP) 4.

Data Sources

Participant Observations and Field Notes.

Over the course of six months, I spent approximately 150 hours at Highland Middle School becoming acquainted with the school culture and volunteering in a general education reading intervention class as directed by the classroom teachers. In the fifth month, my data collection entered an intensive daily observation phase totaling more than 50 class periods in a two-week period. This brief window allowed me to observe students across their core courses and support contexts multiple times. These observations provided focus for the interviews; in particular they provided context for the work students shared in the second interview and provided content for the narrative vignettes shared and developed in the third interview.

Interviews.

One interview was conducted with each teacher in order to confirm observational data and obtain additional perspectives about the participation of focal students. Teacher interviews lasted 20 – 45 minutes and occurred following the majority of classroom observations, allowing observational data to drive the identification of interview topics and modification of interview protocols (See Appendix A for Teacher Interview Guide). One question addressed how the teachers perceived the focal students' participation in the literacy practices in their classes.

Interviews with student participants were central to understanding their participation in the observed classroom literacy practices. These occurred individually, after school at three points in time, lasting an average of 50 minutes each, generally with one to two weeks between each. They were semi-structured interviews, as loosely structured interview procedures are considered to be more productive (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and have been used to successfully foreground student voices in qualitative research focused on students' experiences with disabilities (e.g. Brown, 2009; Givon & Court, 2010). During the first interview (see Appendix C for the First Student Interview Guide), topics addressed aspects of students' lives that link to their learning, by including prompts designed to engage talk about their personal histories, current circumstances and events, practices and identities, and imagined futures (Barton, Ivanič, Appleby, Hodge, & Tusting, 2007). In following interviews, these topics were revisited with particular focus on the literacy events I observed and how students viewed their own identities and practices within these contexts.

The second interview (see Appendix D for the Second Student Interview Guide) was designed to elicit students' responses to the classroom literacy practices that I had observed as well as for them to share some examples of reading and writing they had done. The loose structure of this interview allowed students to use materials in their class binders to facilitate their explanations of class events. This interview guide also gave students the opportunity to share materials with which they were comfortable; first they shared something they felt proud of, then something they found challenging. This allowed students to choose the experiences they wished to reflect on rather than respond to what I perceived to be challenging for them.

The third interview (see Appendix E for the Third Student Interview Guide) similarly sought to center students' experiences by inviting them to co-construct narrative vignettes with me. As I was concerned that this might be a daunting task, particularly for sixth graders who experienced some difficulty with language, I scaffolded this activity with something that each student had independently volunteered as a strength- drawing. Knowing that both students enjoyed drawing, I considered Connor's (2008) work creating narratives with students with SLD in the design of this third interview. I shared a model narrative vignette of a classroom scene I had generated during an early stage of data analysis to make sense of what I had observed (Erickson, 1986). I chose a scene for each student that showcased him or her interacting with peers in an activity that teacher interviews confirmed were typical to classroom practices. First, in individual interviews, I read the model aloud to the students, showing Lauren or Mason the text so each could respectively follow along. Then I asked the student to confirm or correct my narrative to

make it accurate to their memories of the experience. Then, I asked each individual to draw or create a visual representation of the scene from his/her own perspective and describe that drawing for me. While I had initially considered this to be a sort of "warm-up" for the students in creating his/her own narrative, I found each student's drawing and subsequent description to add layers of detail that her/she did not initially volunteer, confirming that this activity allowed each individual to enter into the experience more fully. To create the second narrative, I followed this process in reverse. First, each student decided on a new scene to discuss and illustrated it. While he/she described the drawing, I wrote what each dictated. Then we revised his/her text together until each text was coherent and Lauren and Mason felt their respective texts were accurate to their experiences. This use of narrative vignettes to guide individual student interviews allowed participants to collaborate with me in identifying important themes or concerns as well as to ask questions and clarify understandings (Brown, 2009).

Academic Record Review.

A final source of data included artifacts associated with students' achievement in reading focusing on data collected by the school to categorize students as students who struggled with reading or students who had specific learning disabilities. With the assistance of school personnel, I reviewed K - 6 grade report cards, and grade reports for the current quarter, detailing assignment scores. I also reviewed score report histories for both students of the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress assessment (referred to locally as simply NWEA), an assessment given 2-3

times a year to provide norm-referenced achievement data of students' reading and math skills.

For the student enrolled in the General Education Reading Intervention class (Lauren) I was allowed to review progress monitoring assessment data associated with that class. The Test of Silent Contextualized Reading Fluency (TOSCRF, Hammill, Wiederholt, & Allen, 2006) was used quarterly to provide a timed, normed measure of students' reading fluency growth as indicated by her ability to segment increasingly longer, more complex strings of letters into discernable words. The CBM- Maze, also timed and administered quarterly, reported students' abilities to fill in blanks every seven words by choosing the correct word from three choices, reflecting fluency and comprehension.

For the student who received special education services (Mason) I was allowed to review his special education file including eligibility documentation and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Assessment used in eligibility decisions mainly focused on the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (W-J-III, Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) and the Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence, Second Edition (CTONI, Hammill, Pearson, & Wiederholt, 2009). Two to three times a year, students receiving special education services for reading were assessed with the Qualitative Reading Inventory 3 (QRI-3, Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) an informal reading inventory measuring word recognition in isolation and word recognition, fluency, and comprehension in context to determine instructional reading levels and progress.

Since Mason also received services as an English Learner, the results of the assessment used to determine his placement in ESL services, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs), were included in this review. ACCESS is a one-on-one measure of the performance indicators of WIDA's five English Language Development (ELD) standards: Social & Instructional Language, Language of Language Arts, Language of Mathematics, Language of Science, Language of Social Studies administered once a year (WIDA, accessed 2/27/15).

I collected these data after completing classroom observations and analyzed them after completing other analyses so that my initial perspectives would be shaped primarily by each student (Mason and Lauren) and their participation in their classroom context rather than assessment data. These data play a descriptive role in this study and illustrate one way that students' difficulties or disabilities are understood-- namely the way they are most likely to be understood by teachers and school personnel.

Data Analysis

To answer my first research question, it was necessary to analyze the ethnographic observation data from a constant comparative perspective (Heath & Street, 2008). Throughout the observation period, I analyzed data using constant comparative analysis strategies to compare initial analysis with new data as it was collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I read through observational notes daily to determine key texts for future observation and interview focus. I identified texts as significant as I observed them playing central roles in teacher and student interactions, relying on Heath's (1982)

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definition of literacy events as "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (p.50). As I typed my field notes I cross-referenced text artifacts collected and wrote conceptual memos. I also reviewed and transcribed teacher interviews during this time period, providing me with additional questions that I sought to answer through my observations.

Following the collection of all data, I worked to reduce data into tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) focused on literacy events organized chronologically. Using open and axial coding recursively, I identified types of texts and the ways in which they were used in order to solidify my understanding of the literacy events I had observed. Using Scribner and Cole's (1981) description that a practice is a "recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities" and "socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks" (p.236), I identified patterned ways that texts were being used towards the goals of each classroom. As I regrouped the coded events into a table organized by practices, I included data and notes from the teacher interviews to confirm and extend my preliminary patterns. The perspective of the teachers permitted me insight into some of the more social aspects (e.g., task design, goals, and purposes) for the literacy events I observe.

To answer the second and third research questions, it was essential to foreground the students' perspectives, so I chose to let their interviews guide the rest of the data analysis. Repeatedly reviewing transcribed data from Lauren and Mason's interviews and the co-constructed narrative vignettes allowed me to identify key moments that highlighted each student's understandings of his or her own participation in classroom

literacy practices. Using inductive coding, I identified patterns in the students' comments that I eventually grouped in to four categories of students' comments that defined how each student saw his/her experiences: strengths, challenges, strategies and supports. Using these initial codes, I revisited the observation data, in order to identify examples of Lauren and Mason's participation that illustrated their perceptions as well as counterexamples that complicated these perceptions or called them into question. With this exemplar data I was able to confirm, collapse, and expand codes as needed. At this point I added quotations from the teacher interviews to the data table that further illustrated, complicated, or questioned each student's perceptions. After reviewing the students' words, my observations, and the teachers' words side by side, I coded each type of participation by the classroom context it occurred in: core class context, support class context, both/different, or both/mixed.

Finally for each student, I reviewed the academic record assessment data provided by the school. After reading through the materials, I created tables to summarize data sources in groups by their purpose at the school. I drafted brief descriptive memos to explain trends in the data and analyzed what additional perspective this could add to understanding each student's participation.

Findings

Literacy Practices

To answer the first research question, I will present a brief description of literacy practices observed across eight classes. I have categorized each class as a core class or a support class (See Figure 3.1 below). Core classes- language arts, social studies, science,

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and math- are designated as such because all students enrolled in general education classes take these same four courses from the same four Gold Team teachers. Support classes- Special Education Language Arts (SELA), Special Education School Strategies (SESS), Academic Language Preparation (ALP), and General Education Reading Intervention (GERI)- are designated as such because they are not available to all students; each is an additional support service through either English as a Second Language (ESL, as it is referred to locally), special education, or general education channels with its own selection criteria (explained below). This division is largely reinforced by my observations of the two context categories.

Core Context Classes	Support Context Classes
Language Arts	Special Education Language Arts (SELA)
Social Studies	Special Education School Strategies (SESS)
Science	Academic Language Preparation (ALP)
Math/Honors Math	General Education Reading Intervention (GERI)
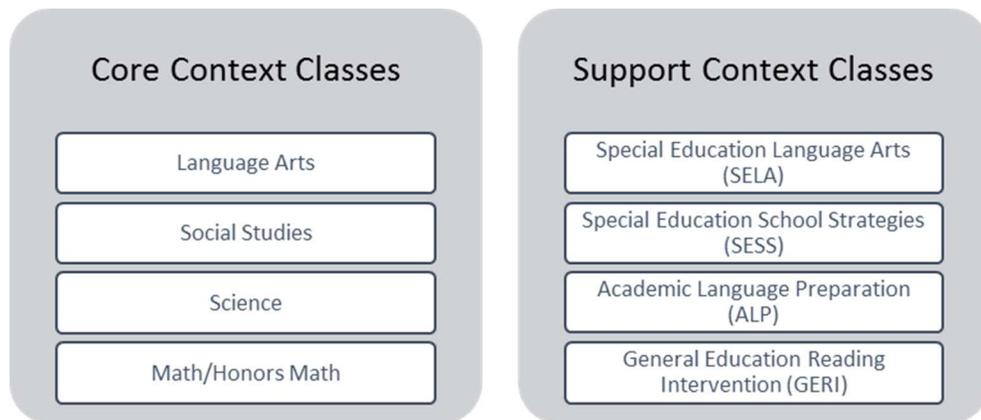
Figure 3.1. Eight Classes in Context-based Categories

As noted in Chapter 2, literacy practices were often observed to be uniquely situated in classrooms; however, there were some trends evident by context type (see Figure 3.2 below for a summary of typical practices). Practices representing each context were selected because they were central to class proceedings; while not necessarily exclusive to their context, these practices were observed with much greater consistency in two or more classes of the context. For example, projecting slides for students to take

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notes happened in many classes, but was more frequent and more central to Core classes. Independent reading was only observed in Support classes. Core classes tended to rely on teacher-led, whole group activities centered around teacher-selected texts in service to established curriculum standards. Support classes still included some whole group instruction but incorporated more student-selected texts and differentiation based on individual student assessment data collected throughout the year

Typical Literacy Practices in Core Contexts	Typical Literacy Practices in Support Contexts
Reading or Listening to Text as a Whole Class	Independent Reading
Writing Guided Notes from a Presentation	Writing Personal Responses to Text
Work with Content Area Vocabulary	Work with Vocabulary & Morphology
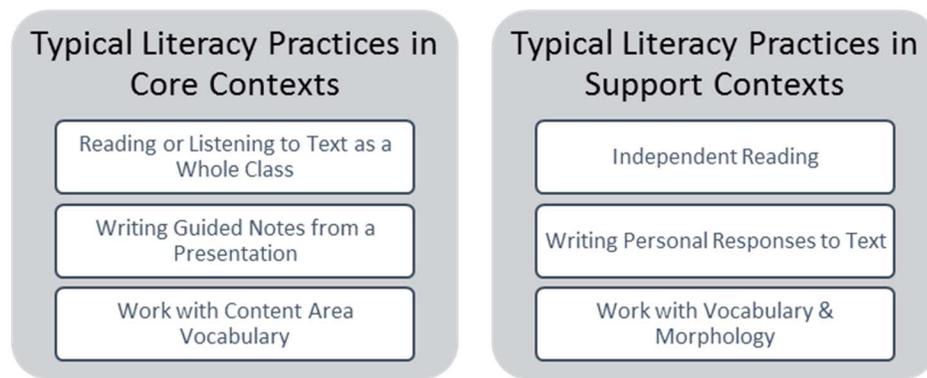
Figure 3.2. Reading, Writing, and Vocabulary Work in Core and Support Contexts

Literacy Practices within Core Classes

Literacy practices observed in these four content classes varied notably in the particulars of how each was locally constructed but reflected several common texts and pedagogical trends. Students maintained similar materials: one large three-ring binder that included notebooks or sections for each class with specially-organized interactive notebooks for social studies and science. Interactive notebooks for language arts were stored in the classroom. Students used an e-textbook of *Northern Lights* (MHS, 2014) as their social studies text and referenced an *Interactive Science* (Buckley, Miller, Padilla, Thorton, & Wysession, 2011) workbook in science, along with supplemental texts as well as a variety of poetry books and poems shared electronically and in paper packets in

language arts. During the observation phase of data collection, students were regularly observed to read or listen to text and respond through answering questions, to write some form of guided notes from a presentation in each class, and to work with content area vocabulary.

Reading in Gold Team classes was almost always done aloud, frequently by the teacher in language arts (Field Notes, 3/17/15) and in social studies (Field Notes, 3/19/15). This was supplemented by electronic media such as an iPad textbook app in social studies (Field Notes, 3/16/15; 3/17/15; 3/18/15; 3/19/15; 3/20/15) and videos in language arts (Field Notes, 3/26/15) and science (Field Notes, 3/26/15; 3/27/15). In language arts, I observed students responding to questions about texts through small group discussions but student artifacts revealed that written responses to questions were also frequently expected. In social studies, students responded to the text by completing a chapter study guide, answering questions as guided by the teacher (Field Notes, 3/18/20; 3/20/15) and by creating a story board depicting events of the Dakota War with drawings and captions for each scene (Field Notes, 3/18/15; 3/19/15; 3/20/15; 3/24/15). In science, students were asked to read shorter texts, such as the video quiz questions to themselves (Field Notes, 3/26/15; 3/27/15). In language arts, students were only observed to read passages to themselves and answers questions during activities preparing them for the state standardized test (Field Notes, 3/18/15; 3/26/15).

Aside from written responses to questions, writing throughout these core courses was often limited to brief instances with a clear format and specified content. Frequently, in language arts, Ms. Miller read from slides and students took guided notes in a

specialized version of Cornell Notes that the teacher described as "filling in the missing words" (Field Notes, 3/16/15; 3/17/15). According to teacher interviews and student artifacts, students had been asked to take some form of Cornell Notes previously in science class (Tompkins, Interview, 3/24/15) as well as on an on-going basis for math videos watched outside of class (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15). General guided note outlines were provided in social studies class for students to complete while watching videos (Field Notes 3/18/15; 3/27/15). One to two sentence summaries were also required as part of the storyboard described above (Field Notes, 3/18/15; 3/19/15)

Vocabulary work was one of the areas where classroom practices varied most dramatically, but at the same time, it was the one key facet that all teachers agreed was central to the work of literacy in their disciplines. Ms. Monahan discussed the importance of knowing roots such as "quad" to recognize new math terms such as "quadrilateral" and "quadrillion" (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15). In math class, students were observed to use a "foldable" to work with domain-specific terms related to ratios/rational numbers (Field Notes, 3/16/15) and a vocabulary word wall to work with probability terms (Field Notes, 3/19/15). In science, students also created a "foldable," in this case a paper folded in half with examples they drew of kinetic and potential energy on each side (Field Notes, 3/24/15). I did not observe the vocabulary word wall in science in use; instead, Ms. Tompkins modeled science vocabulary by telling personal anecdotes and spelling words aloud (Field Notes, 3/17/15). Ms. Miller guided language arts students through domain-specific terms for figurative language and other poetic devices through interactive opportunities to view examples of them (Field Notes, 3/17/15;

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3/18/15; 3/26/15). Mr. Stanford structured the first week of each social studies unit around copying, reviewing, and applying vocabulary specific to the unit in multiple formats, culminating with a quiz on Friday; throughout the week he utilized terms from previous units to explain and make connections to the new content (Field Notes, 3/16/15; 3/17/15; 3/18/15; 3/19/15; 3/20/15).

In each of these classrooms, teachers chose all texts, determined the response formats, and selected the key vocabulary for instruction. In each class there was also a verbal component when the teacher would ask questions aloud and call on students to respond sometimes as a group and sometimes as volunteers; this varied by classroom. These types of participation were often the most easily observable.

Criteria for and Literacy Practices within Support Classes

Literacy practices observed in the support classes also suggested some, not necessarily intentional, similarities despite their differing student populations and instructional foci.   Students maintained some similar materials in support contexts: one inch three-ring binders that stored materials only for that class and were stored in the classroom for the General Education Reading Intervention (GERI), Special Education Language Arts (SELA), and Special Education School Strategies (SESS) classes; reading logs in GERI and SELA; student choice novels in GERI, SELA and Academic Language Preparation (ALP). Other reading materials included online news texts teachers chose to appeal to student interest (ALP, GERI, and SESS) and prescribed skill intervention curricula (SELA and GERI). During the observation phase of data collection, students were regularly observed to read independently, write personal responses to text, and take

a morphological focus on vocabulary work. Though each class offered students some support for language and literacy needs, the criteria for inclusion in each prevented students from being eligible for inclusion in all four classes. Next I briefly explain each class, its inclusion criteria, and some of the literacy practices I observed there.

English as a Second Language Support Class

Academic Language Preparation (ALP) was one of the courses offered to HMS students who are identified as English Learners based on their levels of English proficiency as measured by annual ACCESS assessment. The observed section had 12 level three (Developing) and four (Expanding) students in grades six and seven. Students' home languages did not play a significant role in classroom reading or writing as the teacher, Ms. Martha Nash indicated that "no one is going to give them the [state standards test] in Spanish."

Literacy practices in this class included close reading, explicit teaching of associated vocabulary, using images and words to build a persuasive argument, and guided notes. Students were guided through close readings of nonfiction texts Ms. Nash selected from the internet and periodicals such as *Junior Scholastic*. These were texts Ms. Nash believed to be relevant to their interest (such as school start times, school uniforms) (Field Notes, 3/19/15; 3/20/15; Nash, Interview, 4/7/15). Students were asked to highlight text they deemed important and revisited the text to provide evidence for different sides of an argument. From each piece, Ms. Nash extracted key vocabulary terms that she believed would challenge students and taught them in advance of reading through several strategies, tapping into students' background knowledge, morphological

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analysis skills, and ability to use context clues. Ms. Nash also used multi-modal texts. For example, following a video about water pollution, students worked in groups to use images from magazines and words to convey their own public service announcements (Field Notes, 3/24/15; 3/27/15; 4/7/15).   Later students studied persuasive techniques more formally by writing notes while the teacher shared content from projected slides (Field Notes, 4/7/15).   Artifacts suggests that independent reading was also part of this course, including a sign outside the door that said "Bring your book— we read every day," but this literacy practice was not observed to occur daily. Earlier in the third quarter students had been assigned to read the novel *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000) with a substitute teacher and independently, and answered comprehension questions daily while the teacher was unable to conduct class because of her ACCESS assessment responsibilities.

Special Education Support (SELA & SESS)

Students were determined to be eligible for special education services based on district interpretations of state criteria. Students who received "pull-out" services in fifth grade were often placed in one or both of these support classes based on the determinations of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) committees. There was some discrepancy between the number of service minutes planned when students were in fifth grade and what was available in middle school, typically resolved at the beginning of the school year with a minor IEP addendum.

Special Education Language Arts (SELA). Approximately one-third of sixth grade students with IEPs at Highland Middle School take language arts in a pull-out setting,

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taught by a special education teacher. The SELA class had a prescribed curriculum, primarily based on the commercially published *LANGUAGE! The Comprehensive Literacy Curriculum* materials, which were intended to address students' IEP goals in the area of reading through structured lessons using six ordered instructional steps: Phonemic Awareness and Phonics, Word Recognition and Spelling, Vocabulary and Morphology, Grammar and Usage, Listening and Reading Comprehension, and Speaking and Writing (Greene, 2009). Ms. Vanessa Ritter, a special education teacher in her first year at HMS, chose to supplement the curriculum with work on the Notice and Note strategy (Beers & Probst, 2012), a non-fiction reading comprehension strategy that has become popular at HMS through a professional learning academy offered after school. Ms. Ritter indicated that she was interested in doing this to challenge her students with grade level curriculum.

Observed literacy practices in this class primarily included independent reading and guided notes from slide presentations about the Notice & Note Signposts. Independent reading happened for five minutes at the beginning of each class period. Students read books of their choice and shared one connection or important thing that they learned. Generally, students either read graphic novels and mainly shared plot points or read realistic fiction and shared more personal connections about their lives. During the slide presentations, Ms. Ritter provided details about looking for different Notice & Note Signposts and students were expected to record minimal text, like the anchor question or the symbol on their notes sheets. Video was used to introduce and reinforce content.

Special Education School Strategies (SESS). This new class was designed to provide supplementary special education support service, guided by students' IEP goals. While the course was flexible to address a variety of individualized academic and behavioral goals, Ms. Kendall's seventh hour class focused primarily on writing. Though a school board-approved curriculum existed for this class, *Voices Literature & Writing* (Zaner- Bloser) Ms. Kendall had found students were losing interest in stories with similar protagonists. To supplement this, she chose to design a unit around materials she believed to be more engaging for the students in her class. During this unit of study, students read legends they helped to choose by listening to or volunteering to help the teacher read. Following each legend they worked together to write brief summaries to remember main characters and plot points. Finally, they used the writing process and each student chose one of the legends to retell in his or her own words.

General Education Support

Some students in each grade at HMS were offered a General Education Reading Intervention (GERI) class if they met the established criteria. As this course and its two instructors Ms. Linden and Ms. Madison were funded through a state department education funding source, identification criteria were rigidly adhered to and some practices were explicitly required. Students were considered eligible for this class based on test scores from the previous spring; specifically, they were eligible if they did not pass the state standards reading test and if they scored below the 50th percentile on the NWEA. From this pool of students, teachers removed all students receiving special education services as well as those receiving ESL services at level one or two. From the

approximately 100 students per grade remaining, teachers narrowed the pool in an attempt to keep classroom demographics proportionate to the school-wide demographics. From a list of 60-70 students, the school counselors used students' schedules to narrow the final list down to 40 students per grade, with a maximum of 20 students in each hour. Regular progress monitoring was also stipulated by the funding as well as used to place students in prescribed programs: *Read Naturally Live* (Ihnot, 1991) for students who needed fluency intervention and *REWARDS* (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2005) for students who needed phonics instruction. Students whose scores did not place them in either group were considered to be in need of comprehension and taught in a group with materials determined by the teacher. These loosely structured groups often used high-interest current events topics to practice comprehension strategies.

In addition to completing the interventions above for 20-25 minutes each day, regular literacy practices in this class included daily independent reading paired with weekly response journals shared with the teacher, and bi-weekly morphology instruction. Students began each class session, for twenty-five minutes or more, silently reading books of their choice. Comprehension and progress were monitored through students' journal responses, written as letters through a technology app. Teachers scaffolded this writing by providing a mnemonic device to remind students of the content required: NSAQT- Name (of the book), Summary, Answer (the teacher's question), Question (you have about the book), Thinking (personal connection). Once every week or two, students worked together to create vocabulary trees focused on a root word. From time to time,

the class would take a break from the intervention routine to work on a project such as reviewing story elements and learning basic coding through independent work on a web course.

Students' Participation

To answer the second and third research questions, I will first describe one student in her own words, focusing on how she defines her participation in classroom practices through her own strengths and challenges as well as strategies she employs and supports that she values in her teachers and peers. Next, I will describe the student as I observed her participating in Core class contexts and how I observed her participating in Support class contexts. This will include the ways that the student's self-described strengths, challenges, strategies, and support were or were not apparent in these two context categories. Then, I will include descriptions of the student based on assessment data that was determined to be relevant by the school personnel. Finally, I will compare and contrast these perspectives on the student and her participation as they confirm and complicate the student's own descriptions. I will do the same for the second student.

Lauren's Perspective about Herself as a Learner

Lauren described her participation in classroom practices in terms of the strengths and challenges that she considered attributes of herself and the activities that she, her teachers, an her peers could engage in to further her success. In the matrix below (Figure 3.3) these elements are also divided into those that she feels she can use herself and those that are dependent on others or contextual factors.

	Traits of Student Identity	Activities promoting student success
	Strengths	**Strategies**
Elements student can leverage for success	"Good" Creative Collaborative	Looking up words/ Keep reading Asking questions one-on-one
	Challenges	**Supports**
Elements dependent on contextual interactions	Vocabulary Assignment completion Attention	Teachers being near/approachable Teachers knowing her Peers helping each other

Figure 3.3. Lauren's Self-Described Participation

Strengths

"I think I'm doing better than I was in the beginning of the year… and I feel like, when I read in the beginning of the year I felt like I had to read more easy books and more smaller books. Now I can kind of go with more bigger books with more words."

Lauren lived in an apartment across the street from Highland Middle School with her mother and older brother. Lauren preferred elementary school to middle school (so far), in part because she has felt nervous about meeting new teachers for every class (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). Overall, Lauren viewed herself as a good student because of her grades and because she acts "good" in class, though she also quickly admits that she does not always pay attention (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). She enjoyed being creative, drawing, painting, and dreaming up projects at home and in art class and views this as a family trait, something she has in common with her mother and older brother

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(Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). She tied her identity to her family in this respect as well as when she expressed that she felt her teachers knew her well because the same team had previously taught her brother (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15).   Lauren liked to learn new things, particularly when it included opportunities for projects and collaborative work with peers.   In particular, she liked studying math as she found it easier than other subjects and liked the opportunity to help others with it when she understood (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15).

Lauren rarely volunteered opinions about reading, but she generally seemed to feel good about the progress she believed she was making. Though she did not necessarily express a clear identity as a reader or talk about reading at home, Lauren was learning to select books that were at the "Just Right" level for her and developing preferences in her reading in school, specifically within the realistic fiction genre (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). Lauren did not voice any clear ambitions for her future education or career, but recognized reading and writing as functionally important for applying to jobs and reading signs while driving, as her mother has told her (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15).

Challenges

"To me, it's like really challenging. Because sometimes I don't know as much as words as some other people do. So then it's like… how do I explain this? So then it's like hard to get through a book not knowing all the things in it... Or like writing something and getting stuck on a word because like I don't know how to write it or…"

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Lauren acknowledged that reading and writing could be hard for her because she did not always know the vocabulary she needed for reading a book or completing writing assignments; she reported feeling this even more acutely when trying to do school work at home without her teachers' support (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). On a small number of occasions, Lauren indicated that simply completing an assignment was a challenge. Specifically, she found the pace and organization of science videos to be difficult to keep up with, "it goes kinda fast and we have to get all the answers and then write them down" (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). She acknowledged that she was "not really into science," possibly adding an additional hurdle to this experience for her, but also suggested that this specific challenge might arise when the teacher "doesn't teach the lesson all the way" (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). Lauren reported a certain amount of control over her attention in class, admitting that "when I already know the things and they're just like re-teaching it" she might allow herself to tune out a bit (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). She seemed less confident in understanding when this might become a problem for her, noting that she was uncertain what her teachers meant when they checked in with her, "Sometimes I feel… she thinks I'm off-task or [maybe] she's just asking me how I'm doing but I don't know which one she's actually asking" (Lauren, interview, 4/13/15). Lauren presented her concerns much more assuredly when she felt confident that her peers experienced similar challenges. Lauren prefaced many of the challenges that she discussed with "there's a lot of us," "we always talk about it," "me and my friend," or "people might say" (interview, 4/6/15) suggesting that she was more comfortable

acknowledging challenging situations when she believed that her peers also experienced them that way.

Strategies

"If we're in a class with everybody, I don't raise my hand and ask. I always ask the teacher one on one."

Lauren knew a few basic strategies to help herself when she encountered challenges in her reading or school work, but reported using them inconsistently. When reading unfamiliar words, Lauren reported sometimes stopping to look up words but more often continuing to read to try to figure things out (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). Similarly, she expressed that she could, and probably should, get help in class by asking teachers questions, but she did not often do so. She explained that she did not like to raise her hand in front of everyone but would ask questions of her teachers one-on-one as the opportunity arose (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). In classes where she did not feel like this was an option, she might write a note on the paper to the teacher such as "I need help" (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15).

Supports

"Sometimes if I don't get something, or someone else doesn't get something, we all help each other."

Lauren was more likely to take advantage of the support her teachers offered when they invited her to stay after school with a group of her friends (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). She felt like her teachers did a "pretty good job teaching us how we actually have to write something" and further supported her and her classmates by circulating

around the classroom while they worked, "giving us hints, helping us figure out what we were doing" (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). She appreciated when her Language Arts and Social Studies teachers worked together across disciplines to present and reinforce related content for a unit, noting that the collaboration helped her feel more confident with the information (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). Lauren also valued teachers who knew her well. She specifically mentioned the assessments her General Education Reading Intervention teachers did to monitor her progress and the ways that they used these data to illustrate her growth and help her select books (Lauren, interview, 4/13/15). She liked that they "knew" whether or not she understood a book and would sometimes ask her if it was too challenging, confirming her suspicions that it was, and giving her permission to abandon it (Lauren, interview, 4/13/15).

Lauren also appreciated the support that she got from her peers in class. She explained that "sometimes if I don't get something or someone else doesn't get something, we all help each other" and clarified that she appreciated when this was an option in class because it was not an option for all of her classes (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). Specifically, Lauren found it helpful when peers were able to help one another locate information, "if we ask a classmate, it would be better to show us where to get the answer instead of 'here's the answer, just copy it'" (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). She expressed that taking the time to get to know one another might appear like off-task conversation to teachers, but that it was helpful for their work together (Lauren, interview, 4/13/15).

Both teacher and peer support appeared to be an important part of the way that Lauren saw her learning in school. It is worth noting that Lauren does not feel like she has access to the support she needs at home as "[her] mother went to school in another country" and her older brother will tell her that he "forgot" (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15).

Lauren's Participation in Core Contexts

Strengths

Lauren received all core content instruction in general education classes, taught by the four teachers on the Gold Team. Lauren's strengths, especially her "good" behavior were an important part of her success in these classes. Teachers noted that she was a "great student" (Stanford, interview, 3/20/15) who was "a hard worker... and cooperative" (Miller, interview, 3/23/15). Even teachers who wished that Lauren was a little more actively engaged during class reported that she "wants to learn" (Monahan, interview, 3/24/15) and "wants to do well" (Miller, interview, 3/23/15).

Many of the ways students were asked to respond to text played into Lauren's creative strengths. She was able to incorporate drawing into her storyboard for social studies class, the vocabulary foldable for science, and the idiom illustration for language arts. She chose this last piece as an example of work that she was proud of despite the fact that it had not yet gotten any teacher feedback on it (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). Lauren's creativity was also evident in designing the course for the Marble Roll science lab, an assignment that also played to her strengths in terms of collaborative learning. Ms. Tompkins felt that this particular lab activity was mostly about "creativity" and allowed the students to choose their own groups for a change (Tompkins, interview,

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3/24/15). Lauren elected to work with a peer whom she had also worked with in social studies and identified as a friend, as well as peers she had worked with in math and language arts. Lauren demonstrated leadership as she directed members of her group in drawing the group's "master plan" and kept them on-task, while taking responsibility for many of the material tasks in the assignment (Field Notes, 3/16/15; 3/17/15; 3/19/15). Lauren also had opportunities to help peers in math (Field Notes, 3/18/15; 3/20/15), something she felt confident doing.

Challenges

Lauren mentioned her concerns about getting "in trouble" for not completing one particular type of assignment, the science video quizzes. While she identified this as one of the most challenging types of assignments for her (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15), there were other instances in each of her core classes when she did not hand assignments in on time. Although other students had already received their graded idiom drawings back (Field Notes, 3/26/15), when Lauren shared hers with me, she had not yet turned hers in because she still needed to complete it by adding color (Lauren, Interview, 4/6/15). Lauren also had a number of missing assignments including a social studies worksheet that the teacher had prompted the class about several times (Field Notes, 3/20/15; 3/27/15) and a couple of math classwork and homework assignments (Grade Reports, 4/7/15). There did not appear to be a penalty for late assignments in Lauren's other classes, and Lauren did not seem concerned about turning work in to her other teachers late.

Only Lauren's language arts teacher, Ms. Miller noted that Lauren was a student who "needs to be redirected. She does have a tendency to be looking or doing or engaged with something else" (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). This matches with Lauren's own assessment of her engagement in language arts; when probed about an initial statement about when she chooses to disengage from class, she provided the following example:

I don't always pay attention... Let's say in Language Arts, let's say I already know what an idion [sic] is… an idiom is...and then I already know it, she just like repeats it. I'm like, oh yeah, I already know this so. (Lauren, Interview, 3/19/15).

Further, language arts was the only classroom context where I observed Lauren being verbally redirected. Once in social studies, the teacher asked her not to pack up yet (Field Notes, 3/16/15) and once the science teacher asked to her follow up with some missing work after class (Field Notes, 3/24/15) but on some days, Ms. Miller was observed to redirect Lauren multiple times within a given class period (Field Notes, 3/17/15). These prompts were often phrased as general questions, such as "How are you doing?" (Field Notes, 3/17/15) leaving Lauren unsure about what behavior she might need to correct.

And I was thinking 'what did *I* do?' 'cause like most the time when they say my name I'm like, 'Oh, what *did* I do? Did I do something and they just called my name to say how I was doing? or was I off task?' (Lauren, Interview, 4/13/15)

Ms. Miller was also the only one of Lauren's core teachers to note the ways that Lauren's vocabulary affected her overall reading performance. "She needs to build her

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vocabulary… If I listen to her read, her fluency is affected sometimes by her not being able to pronounce the word and then the fluency sometimes will affect her comprehension" (Miller, Interview, 3/23/15). Despite the central role that vocabulary played in science and social studies (Tompkins, interview, 3/24/15; Stanford, interview, 3/20/15), no other teachers noted Lauren's challenge in this area.

Strategies

Lauren's independent reading strategies were difficult to observe, in part because they were independent, and in part because she had few opportunities to practice independent reading in the core classes observed. On the few occasions when students were utilizing their e-textbook apps in social studies independently, Lauren, like other students, borrowed from the class set of earphones and used the app's speaker feature to listen to sections of the text read aloud. She was also observed to manipulate the iPad screen, review different text features (sidebars, maps, etc.), and once take a brief break, putting her head down on her forearms for a moment before returning to "reading" (Field Notes, 3/20/15). This gesture suggested that when challenged by the text in some way, Lauren was willing to return to "keep going to see what makes sense" (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15).

In three of her core classes, Lauren felt that asking questions was allowed: language arts, social studies, and math (Lauren, interview, 4/6/15). In all three classes, Lauren was observed to ask questions of the teachers one-on-one when the opportunities presented themselves. During a "What Do You Notice?" introductory activity, Ms. Miller approached Lauren's table and Lauren asked Ms. Miller for help coming up with a

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term to describe part of a poem. Initially, Ms. Miller referred Lauren to her peers to

come up with the word, but when neither of the students seated at her table were able to

come up with it, Ms. Miller provided a hint that helped Lauren recall the term "stanza"

(Field Notes, 3/17/15). In social studies, students were provided with several periods of

independent work time to complete the final draft of their storyboard projects (Field

Notes, 3/24/15; 3/26/15; 3/27/15). As Mr. Stanford walked by her desk, Lauren called

him over to ask a question about how do draw the Traditional Dakota. He guided her

through a series of questions requiring her to access her background knowledge about

where they lived and how they hunted. She was able to respond correctly to some of his

questions and required additional prompting from him on others. Lauren added a

question about a detail relevant to her drawing, "Did they have long hair?" (Field Notes,

3/26/15). In math, Ms. Monahan often approached Lauren's table and made a point of

checking in with Lauren directly (Field Notes, 3/18/15; Field Notes, 3/20/15). More than

any other teacher, Ms. Monahan recognized Lauren's reluctance to seek help publically:

> She waits 'til you notice that she doesn't get it. You have to ask her, 'do you
>
> want help with this?' or 'can I help with that?'… I don't think she wants anybody
>
> to realize she doesn't get it… she's very much into, 'what do other people think of
>
> me?' and 'I don't want to appear that I don't know how to do something so I'm
>
> better off saying nothing than to let anybody know I don't know it.'" (Monahan,
>
> interview, 3/24/15)

Possibly because of understanding Lauren this way, Ms. Monahan made sure she was

frequently available for questions.

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Supports

In each of the above noted instances of Lauren asking her teachers for help, it should be noted that teachers spent most (social studies) if not all (language arts, math) of the time allocated for independent work circulating amongst students. In science, the class where Lauren equated doing independent work with not being allowed to ask questions, the teacher circulated less frequently. In particular, during the science video quizzes that Lauren found challenging, Ms. Tompkins remained seated at her desk, largely unavailable for questions (Field Notes, 3/26/15; Field Notes, 3/27/15). Lauren appreciated the support offered by teachers who were easy to approach with questions because they are physically nearby in the classroom on a regular basis.

When no adult was nearby in math, Lauren helped the peer seated to her right, a student who had been absent the previous day. Lauren used her pencil to point to details on the peer's paper and talk through details. Toward the end of class, a friend Lauren worked with in science and social studies crossed the room and knelt by Lauren's desk to ask a question (Field Notes, 3/20/15). Despite asking for help, or possibly because she asked for help, Lauren was viewed as a knowledgeable member of this class, at least within her immediate peer group. Ms. Monahan appeared to encourage this type of peer support as well; when she approached the student kneeling next to Lauren's desk she checked with them about their work rather than scolding them. On a previous day, Ms. Monahan had directed a student who had been called out of the class to ask Lauren for help catching up (Field Notes, 3/18/15). Though Ms. Monahan considered Lauren to be "on that boundary between the two groups" in terms of the honors math class that she

was in and the grade level math class (Monahan, interview, 3/24/15), it appeared that she

recognized Lauren's strength in helping peers as well as the value Lauren and, ostensibly

other students, placed on trusting peers for academic support.   Ms. Monahan was also the

teacher that invited Lauren to come after school with some of her friends to get additional

help (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). Lauren understood that she should probably get help

from her teachers this way more frequently (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15), but she

appeared to really value a teacher encouraging her in this way and found the invitation

more appealing because it incorporated her peers.

Lauren's Participation in Support Contexts

Strengths

Lauren's past performance on reading assessments qualified her for the General

Education Reading Intervention (GERI) class. Ms. Linden, one of the GERI teachers,

described the particular section that Lauren was in as "unique compared to the rest of the

day" in that the class was at capacity of twenty students and the "needs [were] much

higher in this group than in any of our other classes" (Linden, interview, 4/6/15).

Lauren's generally "good" behavior was noted in this class also by Ms. Linden who

described her as "motivated, on task," and "cooperative" (Linden, interview, 4/6/15) and

co-teacher Ms. Madison who described Lauren as "a very, very hard worker" (Madison,

interview, 4/8/15). Though Lauren did not necessarily describe herself as a reader, she

expressed that one thing she felt was important in sixth grade reading was choosing her

own texts and finding those that were appropriately challenging and engaging (Lauren,

interview, 4/6/15). After choosing *Deep Down Popular* (Stone, 2008) at the beginning

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of March, Lauren appeared to be visibly engaged in this book, often sitting with her feet on the adjacent chair and holding the book with her body curled away from her peers (Field Notes, 3/20/15) for long stretches of time, beginning reading before class started (Field Notes, 3/16/15) and needing to be prompted to transition from silent reading to other class activities (Field Notes, 3/12/15; Field Notes, 3/13/15). She did this quietly and consistently, in contrast to many of her peers who entered class eager to talk about their books some days but had difficulty maintaining the same engagement in a reading over time. She read from this same book for approximately two months before completing it and asking Ms. Madison to recommend another book (Field Notes, 4/29/15). In the class of twenty students, only two others were observed to persevere with books for such an extended period; most students either read more rapidly and brought books home to finish them or switched books every day or two without finishing them.

Lauren had few opportunities to exercise her creative and collaborative strengths in this class, but appreciated the times when these were available. During a two-week period in which the teachers had decided to take a break from the interventions, students worked independently and in small groups on activities to review story elements. The culminating activity, creating a visual representation of the terms, labeled, was the event that Lauren chose to depict for her narrative vignette because "it was like, one project that everybody got to work together with their groups and it doesn't happen that much" (Lauren, Interview, 4/13/15).

Challenges

Lauren's difficulties with vocabulary were not readily apparent in this support class. The *REWARDS* intervention that Lauren participated in during the first semester provided her with strategies to decode multisyllabic words, using common phonetic patterns and affixes with a minimal amount of vocabulary instruction. According to course progress monitoring procedures, Lauren's scores at the mid-point of the year exceeded the benchmark and moved her into the *Read Naturally* fluency intervention. Within this program, vocabulary was controlled within below grade leveled passages and key terms were easily defined with a tap on the screen. Lauren's ability to progress through these interventions did not seem impeded by her not knowing as many words as she perceived others did. On the occasions, typically Fridays, when the class skipped interventions in order to focus on building root word trees, Lauren was able to complete hers successfully by brainstorming with peers or waiting to write down words that others had suggested (Field Notes, 3/13/15).

Neither completing work at a given pace nor remaining engaged during class, two things that had occasionally inhibited Lauren in her core classes, appeared to cause her any difficulty in this support class. Unlike her core classes, all work in GERI was to be completed in class. Lauren received full points for participation and all classwork activities, including the weekly journals students were required to write. Despite receiving full points for each entry, Ms. Madison, the teacher who corresponded with Lauren through this journal all year felt that these writings reflected Lauren's "tremendous problem with comprehension," particularly when it came to what she called

"habits" for active reading (Madison, Interview, 4/8/15). She recounted an example from earlier in the year when Lauren had neglected to complete all aspects of the NSAQT acronym, specifically the T for "thinking":

> "She was reading like the Babysitter Club books, I think… I had her resubmit because she didn't do any of the thinking. And then when she sent it back she said, 'the only thinking I had was what was on the back of the book' and then she just repeated what was on the back of the book… She didn't come up with her own." (Madison, Interview, 4/8/15).

It may be that the challenge that Lauren identified in getting through a book as "it's hard… not knowing all the things in it" (Lauren, Interview, 3/19/15) reflects some difficulties that Lauren has experienced with recognizing words and literal comprehension of texts, affecting the higher order or meta-cognitive skills that Ms. Madison considers her "thinking" (Madison, 4/8/15). Despite this ongoing challenge, Ms. Madison felt that writing the journals had really helped Lauren and that they were "sure a lot better than they used to be" (Madison, Interview, 4/8/15).

Strategies

Given sufficient time to read independently in GERI, it was still not clear what strategies, if any Lauren employed when she encountered unfamiliar words. She was never observed to stop to look words up. It was possible that she continued reading to see what made sense, as she indicated (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15) or it may be that she just continued reading. The journals that she completed did not specifically address vocabulary in this way; she chose to write with words she knew well.

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Lauren continued to use her one-on-one question-asking strategy successfully in this support class whenever the class activities deviated from the regular routine of independent reading and intervention. During the story elements review activities, Lauren asked Ms. Linden, Ms. Madison, and me for help, depending on which of us was standing closest to her table at the time (Field Notes, 3/16/15; 3/17/15). On one occasion, Lauren asked Ms. Madison a question and did not get a direct answer, but rather a prompt to keep thinking about it because Ms. Madison did not want to tell her exactly what she needed to write on a story map showing the events of the story Cinderella. A few moments later, Lauren asked me a similar question, looking for a more concrete answer about what to put on each of the five lines on when she could only think of four events in the story's rising action. Like Ms. Madison, I addressed the Lauren and the peers at her table, asked them to brainstorm important events together, but also added that they need not be overly concerned with a specific number of events if they felt they had gotten the important points (Field Notes, 3/16/15).

Supports

Though she may not have considered it to be a benefit in that instance, one support readily available to Lauren and the other GERI students was multiple teachers. During independent reading Ms. Linden often circulated with a clipboard marking on a record sheet next to students' names the titles of the books they were reading and what pages they were on each day (Field Notes, 3/13/15; 3/16/15; 3/25/15). Ms. Madison occasionally pulled students to a desk at the side or rear of the room for a short conference about the books they were reading (Field Notes, 3/13/15). Though Lauren

was rarely observed to interact with teachers during this part of class, they were available to her if she needed to do so.

Lauren did not spend much time interacting with peers in this context either. On occasion she would seek out a peer from her other classes and briefly discuss a social matter, but would quickly settle into her reading when her peers continued chatting and required multiple prompts to get started (Field Notes, 3/11/15; 3/13/15). Lauren did not appear to be close friends with any of the other students. Only a few of the other students had their core classes on the Gold Team and none of the students she was observed interacting with in other classes were in this section of GERI. Though there were few occasions for peers to support each other, Lauren's group did so effectively when they completed the story elements diagram. She described the way individual students contributed ideas that supported what others had proposed to complete the assignment (Lauren, Interview, 4/13/15).

One incident of peer support stands as a counterexample to what Lauren preferred in terms of peer support. Despite her insistence that it was more helpful when peers could show you how to get an answer rather than just allowing you to copy, Lauren did just the opposite during a class review game. During a "Kahoot" game designed to review the root words the class had been studying, Lauren sat next to a peer with whom she seemed to interact in a joking, friendly manner. Approximately half way through the game, the peer had established a strong lead and some of the other students in class were reacting unkindly. In this heated competition, other students began to notice that Lauren's score was approaching second place. Lauren was playfully accused of looking

at her peer's screen before submitting her own answers. Lauren laughed as she admitted

to it and said something to the peer like "I always let you answer first" indicating that she

would cheat, but would not do something to get a higher score than her friend. (Field

Notes, 3/12/15).

One support that Lauren identified as unique to her GERI class was the teachers'

use of continued assessment to track her progress. Lauren interpreted this detailed data

collection as a specific kind of knowledge that she appreciated about her teachers and

came to rely on, at times, more than her own judgment. "I feel like those [assessments]

help for them to know how good, or how much we are growing in our reading" (Lauren,

interview, 4/13/15). Lauren felt like these assessment tools along with the weekly

journals allowed her teachers to "know if we understood a book or not" and appreciated

that teachers could help her decide whether the book was a good match for her:

> So I feel like, if you're reading a too-challenging book and you did an Edmodo
>
> [journal] on that book, they'd like ask you if that book is too challenging or not.
>
> And then it's easier, because then you're like, 'ok, they know the book is
>
> challenging for me, and I kind of think it's challenging' so they'll tell you like, 'is
>
> this book too challenging or do you want to keep reading? or do you want to
>
> abandon it?'" (Lauren, interview, 4/13/15).

Through Lauren's appreciation of her teachers' knowledge is important to the

relationships she has with them, it may indicate that she is not comfortable assessing her

own comprehension. It appears that Lauren has not learned ways to self-assess or reflect

in metacognitive ways, something that might hinder her ability to know if she

comprehends text on her own. This also has potential to impact her feelings of self-efficacy in reading and the types of texts she might be willing to try in the future.

Lauren in Terms of School Identifications and Metrics

In her previous five years at Mt. Philips Elementary school, Lauren's report cards reflect fairly consistent work in the areas of reading, writing, and content area vocabulary (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Summary of Lauren's Elementary Report Cards, Grades 1-5

		Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5
Reading	Reads grade level material	2	2	2	2	2
	Understands what is read	3	3	2	2	2.67
	Applies Early Reading Strategies	2.67	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Reads fluently with expression	2.33	3	1.67	2	2
	Demonstrates positive reading habits	3	3	2	2.33	3
Writing	Expresses ideas in writing/speaking	2.67	3	2.33	2	3
	Organizes writing	2.33	3	2	2	3
	Uses writing conventions	2.67	2.33	3	2	3
	Word study (includes spelling)	2.33	3	2	2	2
Science	Critical Skills and Vocabulary	NA	NA	2.67	3	3
Social Studies	Critical Skills and Vocabulary	NA	NA	3	3	2

Key: 4= performing beyond grade level expectations, 3= performing at grade level, 2= progressing with teacher support, 1= requires a high level of practice and teacher support

Based on these evaluations, Lauren's reading habits have been positive throughout her elementary years, but she has never been considered a grade level reader. Her comprehension has always been considered stronger than her fluency and on average, her writing skills are closer to grade level expectations than her reading skills. Lauren's concerns about her vocabulary are not explicitly reflected in her grade reports. It is not clear from her academic records what, if any, reading interventions Lauren received during her elementary school years. Notably, Lauren's fifth grade teacher

indicated that she "is a strong self-advocate. When she doesn't understand a concept, she

does a wonderful job asking for clarification" (Report Card, 6/3/14). This point stands in

interesting contrast to the variable advocacy behaviors Lauren has exhibited in different

sixth grade classrooms.

Lauren's academic performance in sixth grade (so far) as measured by letter

grades suggested that has she maintained average or above average grades in each of her

classes (Table 3.2). Following the first quarter, Lauren's grades have slipped some, with

the exception of her General Education Reading Intervention class.

Table 3.2. Lauren's 6th grade Report Card

	Q1	**Q2**	**Q3***
Language Arts	B	B	B-
Social Studies	A	B	B-
Science	B	C+	B
Honors Math	A-	C	C
General Education Reading Intervention	A	A+	A+

*Quarter 3 grades are derived from progress reports printed the day before the end of the grading period. Progress reports include missing grades and do not necessarily match final grades.

Lauren's ability to maintain average to above average grades in her Core classes with

minimal outside of class support (of these classes) suggests that her reading challenges do

not significantly impact her performance in the literacy practices that Core teachers

constructed. In Lauren's case, it is notable that her lowest grade is in Honors Math, an

area where she expressed confidence.

Standardized measures, in particular the NWEA assessment were given a lot of

weight in class placement at HMS. Her scores on the Spring 2014 test qualified her for

both the Honors Math class and GERI support class in which she was enrolled for the 2014-2015 school year (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Lauren's NWEA Scores in Reading and Math

Grade	Season	Reading		Math	
		RIT	%ile	RIT	%ile
6	W15	214	49	NA	NA
	F14	210	44	NA	NA
5	S14	202	23	233	79
	F13	203	39	212	47
4	S13	207	51	210	68
	F12	186	17	204	53
3	S12	199	49	204	53
	F11	164	4	180	17
2	S11	169	8	185	31
	F10	153	7	169	24

As Ms. Monahan noted, Lauren was very much on the cusp of qualifying for the Honors Math class and her spring NWEA percentile scores from previous years would not have put her in the range of the necessary 80th percentile benchmark. On the other hand, Lauren's 23rd percentile in reading clearly made her eligible for General Education Reading Intervention, while her Spring 2013 and Spring 2012 scores, 51st percentile and 49th percentile, respectively, would likely not have qualified her for this support class.

Once in the GERI class, students participated in regular progress monitoring on a monthly and quarterly basis. Normed (TOSCRF) and curriculum-based (Maze) progress monitoring measures of reading fluency and reading comprehension reflected consistent progress for Lauren (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Progress Monitoring Measures of Lauren's Reading Fluency and

Comprehension

	Q1	Q2	Q3
TOSCRF (percentile)	16th	32nd	45th
Maze (correct/incorrect)	11 /3	21/1	26/1

Lauren's teachers shared these data with students and asked them to fill out their own data documents to involve them in tracking their growth and encourage them. Students did not set their own goals, but teachers involved them by sharing a goal with them:

> The Maze, they, the computer program creates a goal, well, we kinda create the goal number for them and then we just show them 'this is the number that you need to be at' So they know what that number is. I don't always think that they understand what that number means, but at least if they have a number they're working towards. (Linden, Interview, 4/8/15)

The General Education Reading Intervention teachers frequently discussed student assessment and intervention data and recognized its implications for their program. Often conversations centered around individual students and what each was or was not doing within the class intervention structure that might have led to those results. Both teachers relied on computer software to track and make sense of student data, but they did not always agree on how to interpret this data (Field Notes, 3/20/15). This lack of agreement may be one reason that instruction was rarely observed to change in relationship to the data other than when students were re-assessed for intervention

placement mid-year. Ms. Linden and Ms. Madison also did not share this data with Lauren's core teachers; they had no opportunities to collaborate or consult in this manner.

Summary and Analysis of Lauren's Case

What do these data suggest about Lauren's identification as a struggling reader and her access to 6th grade curriculum? More than teacher-assigned grades, standardized test scores played a large role in determining Lauren's class schedule. **Lauren's scores on assessments and subsequent inclusion in the General Education Reading Intervention class constructed her as a struggling reader at Highland Middle School.** Despite the consistent progress noted on the measures used in her support class, positive changes were not noted in Lauren's core course quarterly grades. Similarly, this progress would not play into the decision of whether Lauren would receive a support class in her seventh grade year; that determination would be made by end of year standardized test scores.

Lauren Across Contexts

To further corroborate, contradict, or complicate Lauren's description of her participation, I now explore how the strengths, challenges, strategies, and supports that Lauren identified for herself were evident across Core and Support class contexts (see Figure 3.4 below).

Strengths	Strategies
"Good"	Looking up words/ Keep reading
Creative	Asking questions one-on-one
Collaborative	
Vocabulary	Supports
Assignment completion	Teachers being near/approachable
Attention	Teachers knowing her
Vocabulary	Peers helping each other

	Observed similarly across contexts
	Observed only in core contexts
	Observed only in support contexts
	Observed in both/ mixed within core & support contexts

Figure 3.4. Lauren's participation as observed in core and support contexts.

Lauren believed that her teachers knew she was receiving extra reading support through the General Education Reading Intervention class (Lauren, interview, 4/13/15). This is entirely possible as teachers were asked to fill out a behavior report for students in this class each quarter. It is not clear whether she believed this meant that they were working together to support her. Due to schedule constraints, core Gold Team teachers did not have any opportunity to collaborate with the GERI teachers or discuss student progress.

Lauren had many strengths as a student that her teachers recognized and she, somewhat reluctantly, acknowledged as well. She was able to collaborate with her peers in effective ways that extended beyond social sharing and enhanced her own learning as well as assisting in peers' learning processes. Lauren's creativity and artistic skills were an asset to her as assignments regularly in core and, less frequently, in support classes

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required her to create multimodal representations of content that reflected her understanding of vocabulary (Science Field Notes, 3/24/15; Language Arts Field Notes, 3/20/15; GERI Field Notes, 3/17/15;3/18/15;3/19/15) and of key events (Social Studies, Field Notes, 3/18/15; 3/19/15; 3/20/15; 3/24/15). Her motivation to learn and willingness to persist and ask questions, though more context-dependent, was also a strength that Lauren's teachers wished to foster in her.

Some of the challenges that Lauren experienced, such as not knowing "as much words as some other people do" (Lauren, Interview, 3/19/15) may have had larger consequences than she recognized. As Ms. Miller and Ms. Madison agreed, her reading fluency and reading comprehension were also impacted in significant ways by her vocabulary, something they noted in different class contexts. Lauren's occasional sense of pressure to complete work in a timely manner may have also been a larger impediment to her academic success than she recognized. When Lauren did not complete tasks assigned in class, there seemed to be less of a chance that she would complete them in a timely manner or at all. This may be related to her sense that she could not get support when working on them at home as well as her preference to go to the park or watch TV with friends after school (Lauren, interview, 3/19/15). Grades in some classes appeared to suffer for this more than others. The strong sense of advocacy that her fifth grade teacher remarked on was not obvious throughout her sixth grade day.

Mason's Perspective about Himself as a Learner

Mason was an overwhelmingly positive student who described school and his participation in classes through this same positive perspective (see Figure 3.5 below).

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	Traits of Student Identity	Activities promoting student success
	Strengths	**Strategies**
Elements student can leverage for success	Positive Organization Memory	Asking for help "Doing effort"
	Challenges	**Supports**
Elements dependent on contextual interactions	Independent academic reading Content vocabulary reading & writing Pace/time Home circumstances	Structuring of reading assignments Structuring physical environment Structuring social environments Teacher knowing when help is needed

Figure 3.5 Mason's self-described participation.

Strengths

"A type of student they actually want. A fun kid… I have a lot of joy inside me."

Mason lived with his mother, his older sister, and his niece since his father went to Mexico. Visits with cousins and family parties with his aunts were also an important part of Mason's family life. When I first met Mason he, unprompted, told me several favorite memories from elementary school including the time he won a prize at the state fair for a nature photograph he had taken and the time he broke his leg while scoring the winning goal for his soccer team. These, possibly embellished, tales illustrated his love of art and sports as well as his keen memory and his strong sense of how to connect with others through sharing stories.   It did not take much time spent with Mason to see the joy he claimed.

Mason shared many positive beliefs about Highland Middle School and his teachers, and his school, saying, it's "the best school I ever seen. It's fun, has a lot of

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stuff, sports, anything you really need, and help… the best teachers, yeah a lot of help"

(Mason, Interview, 3/16/15). Mason also presented a positive view of himself as a

student. He said that he liked to study and talked about wanting to do well in school to

because of his aspirations to go to college as well as wanting to make both his family and

his teachers proud (Mason, interview, 3/16/15).

Mason felt particularly confident in his abilities in math and liked being able to

help others in this area especially, "I like helping people with their homework 'cause like,

I know I'm so smart enough. I'm a kid that knows a lot of math. I understand it so fast"

(Mason, Interview, 3/16/15). Mason also reported feeling that he had improved in

reading last year as he recalled receiving a score matching the passing benchmark on his

state-standards reading test (unconfirmed data; self-reported). As a reader, Mason was

motivated to check books out of the library to read at home, choosing "like every book:

chapter books or… comic books, like action comic books" (Mason, interview, 3/16/15).

Mason also appeared to take a great deal of pride in his neatly organized binder.

In the front pocket he kept current important papers such as his new class schedule for the

quarter. A grey fabric pencil pouch with a green highlighter and several broken pencils

were zipped inside. For each subject he maintained a tabbed section with important

papers in the divider pocket at front and other papers behind it. For some classes, such as

social studies he had extra materials such as a printed packet of the e-textbook chapter to

take home and an extra blank copy of the study guide "just in case." In the back pocket of

his binder, Mason stored very special papers that made him proud including an essay that

he had written about self-driving cars during the first quarter of the school year:

It makes me proud because… I really thought 6th grade was going to be hard for

me. But my first time being in middle school and I succeeded at projects like

this… that's why it makes me proud. That's why I keep it there. (Mason,

Interview, 4/7/15)

In addition to being able to locate materials quickly, Mason also seemed to

remember details well. When telling me about a book he had recently read (and possibly

the related animated program) Mason shared detailed elements of the plot and character

descriptions that included their interactions and favorite foods. As I noted above, he also

enjoyed telling detailed personal stories and used these to make connections with peers

and teachers. While Mason's memory sometimes appeared to be one of his strengths,

other times it was challenging for him to remember exact details. Still other occasions

indicated that he used his procedural knowledge, recounted via memories, as a strategy to

cope in class when he lacked content knowledge. For example, when I asked Mason

about a social studies vocabulary worksheet that he had worked on with a peer, he first

told me that he remembered the day well. Then he drew a detailed image including room

décor I had not noticed and colored his outfit according to how he had been dressed that

day. When explaining what he remembered about the actual event, some of the details

that Mason recalled did not match what I had noted, including his report that he did not

know what to do to complete and asked the teacher for help. When I asked for

clarification, his story changed slightly to indicate that he did remember doing similar

worksheets before, but that is was the actual vocabulary words that he had struggled to

remember that day. As Mason had been out of the classroom when the vocabulary had

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been reviewed, this seemed plausible; however, it seemed that Mason was claiming to have difficulty with remembering how to do a task so that he did not have to immediately admit that he did not know the vocabulary words he was supposed to be learning.

Mason presented himself and his experiences in such a consistently positive manner that the volume and tone of his voice changed any time he had something negative to say. When mentioning his own challenges, sad events that had happened in his life, or describing how class could go better for him, his voice became quieter and was often muffled by yawns.

Challenges

"the hards are so, the words are so hard… and sometimes I forget what they mean because I have everything you ever to like remember so, seven classes, stuff."

One of the challenges that Mason was most upfront about was his difficulty recognizing or remembering all of the vocabulary words he was expected to learn in sixth grade. He was willing to admit, "It's pretty hard because there's new words" (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15). Though he liked to learn new words and integrate them into his writing, he was not as confident in his abilities to do so. Mason felt that his vocabulary knowledge was limited and that this made writing more difficult; "Writing… I think it's hard for me because there's a lot of words out there ... that I could use instead of using the repeat words I use" (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15). Once, when reading an essay that he had written, Mason stumbled over several words. He stopped to ask me what MPH meant, saying ""I never knew what this meant for cars" even though he had included it in a finished piece of writing that he proudly shared with me (Mason, Interview, 4/17/15).

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Another challenge that Mason encountered, albeit infrequently, was when he had

to read a text for class and answer questions about it independently. He noted that this

type of reading only really occurred in one of his classes. In the majority of Mason's

classes, texts were read aloud by the teacher or through the use of electronic media. In

one class, Mason volunteered to read aloud to his peers. He did not express similar

difficulties in reading books of his choice independently.

Mason noted that an additional challenge he associated with the science video

quizzes was when understanding the presenter on the video when "he was talking so fast"

(Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). This difficulty with keeping up was observable on other

assignments and in other classes as well. Mason similarly expressed that keeping up

affected the expression of his own ideas as well. Though he reported he often could

come up with a great number of ideas to write about, he noted that he sometimes ran out

of time to write about them (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15).

Though Mason rarely complained, there were a few instances in which he brought

up challenging circumstances in his home life that affected his school performance. Once

Mason explained to me that he was tired because he had been up early helping his sister

get the baby ready for school (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). Another time, Mason

described how he sometimes stayed up late to talk to his mother when she got home from

work (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15). Resources at home affected Mason's school life as

well. He did not go on a week-long field trip because his mother "thought it was too

much money" (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15). His family does not have access to the

internet at home which prevented both Mason and his mother from checking his grade

progress online. This also affected Mason's ability to do some of his assigned homework which, in turn affected his grades negatively. He explained:

> If I don't have internet I'll maybe get a C- or a D. But then I'll tell the teachers I don't have internet and they tell me to stay after school. They kind of rise [sic] my grades a little bit because I don't have internet and I really can't stay all the days after school. (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15).

Strategies

"I really don't wanna forget. Because… I actually tried all my best all these years."

When Mason first explained Highland Middle School, "a lot of help" was one of the ways that he chose to describe it. Mason recognized that asking for help was one strategy he could use in some situations and not others, such as during a test (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). When pressed for details about how his teachers were able to help him, he gave very general answers and no specific examples of times when he had asked for teachers' help (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15).

Mason's primary strategy for succeeding is school was to keep trying. He associated many of his positive traits with his continued determination, describing some of his proudest moments as when he "really didn't stop trying" and "did a lot of effort" (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15; Interview, 4/22/15). I asked Mason what his teachers might say when he told them that some assignments were hard for him and he quickly responded, "try your best" reinforcing his idea that effort is the most important thing (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). When I asked Mason about what he thought letter grades

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signified, he immediately construed poor grades with lack of effort. "A 'B' is alright, an 'A' is you did amazing, a 'C' is you're going good, and a 'D' is like you should try a little bit harder. An 'F' is like you didn't even try" (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). After a follow up question, he hesitated, so in order to clarify, I asked Mason to interpret the grades more personally by asking if he thought the difference between a B and a C+ was how hard he tried. He replied confidently, "Nah, I try my best" suggesting that he might be beginning to recognize grades could be associated with something other than his effort (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15).

Supports

"Tell me what to do in an obvious way."

Mason appreciated the support teachers offered and noticed this in the ways that they structured their class activities and reading assignments. He found it helpful when readings were brief and more importantly when they are read aloud together "as a team" (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). He also found it helpful when teachers provided visual examples that he could follow such as on a white board and when they explained examples in terms that were familiar to him with step-by-step sequences when applicable (Mason, interview, 4/7/15). This was very similar to how Mason said he liked to help his peers, "I show them math, but easier; reading, but easier. I break it down" (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15).

Mason felt that his teachers could tell whether or not he understood class content and if it seemed that he did not, they would approach him to offer help. He said if he would "just look weird at the white board, like, 'What?'" that his teachers would come

over to assist him. He indicated that this happens in all of his classes (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15).

Mason also noted aspects of his learning environment that he found supportive. He explained that he was more comfortable volunteering to read and sharing in class when he knew the other students well (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15). In addition to this social environment that he recognized that teachers created, Mason was also attentive to the physical environment of his classroom spaces. The idea of moving from class to class was a challenge that Mason noted, particularly in talking about his adjustment from elementary school to Highland Middle School. After visiting his locker in the third floor corridor dedicated to the Gold team, Mason's daily schedule required him to go down to the first floor for his first hour class, up to the third floor for his second hour class, downstairs for third hour and lunch, upstairs for fourth and fifth hour before going downstairs for sixth and seventh hour at the end of the day. Students were required to make each of these transitions in three minutes or less and Mason noted his appreciation for teachers who gave him tips about how to get to class more efficiently as well as those who helped direct him when he needed to go to unfamiliar parts of the building (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). Mason also seemed very cognizant of the physical environment of the classrooms he spent his days in. When I asked him if he preferred bigger (Core) or smaller (Support) classes, he said that he liked the smaller classes because they made it easier to hear and learn. In the smaller classes he felt he was able to "get better at reading and stuff" which he did not think would be possible in the noisier, larger classes (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15).

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Mason's Participation in Core Class Contexts

Strengths

Mason only had three core classes taught by general education Gold Team teachers, social studies, science, and math.   His teachers in these class contexts recognized his positive nature, describing him often as a "sweet kid" (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15) and noting his "really good, open attitude" (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15). Mason was an active, enthusiastic participant during the hands-on Marble Roll Lab, frequently volunteering to do things for his group (Field Notes, 3/17/15). Of his teachers, Ms. Monahan took particular note of Mason's eagerness to learn in math. Unlike many of his peers, she indicated that Mason embraced a mindset of "I don't care what anybody thinks, I want to learn this and I'm curious" (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15). Though generally very quiet in these core class contexts he did appear to engage in math class with the teacher and peers positively as well as in social studies and science classes with small groups of peers when directed to do so. Minimal interactions with the teachers were observed in these latter core classes.

Though Ms. Monahan indicated that Mason sometimes needed prompting to aid his organization, she referred specifically to his needing reminders to turn in homework assignments. Mason was not observed to utilize his planner to copy homework assignments down from the board at the back of the room in math class. He was, however, more likely to copy social studies assignments as Mr. Stanford prompted the class to do each day; most weeks Mason's planner had approximately one social studies assignment recorded (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). On the one occasion that Ms. Tompkins

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prompted Mason's science class to record an assignment as their exit ticket from class, Mason turned to me to ask the date and flipped past some blank pages, suggesting it was the first time he had used the assignment book in a while (Field Notes, 3/24/15).

Despite this, Mason seemed to know exactly where each of the papers he needed for each class were. At the beginning of class and during transitions between activities, Mason was often observed to be carefully filing or organizing papers in his binder (Field Notes 3/19/15; 3/20/15; 3/24/15). While this took time, he never appeared to be hurriedly searching for papers when he needed them. This organizational strength is called into question by the number of assignments Mason is missing. He neglected to turn in classwork and homework assignments in all three core classes, often without explanation. These missing assignments had a negative impact on Mason's grade which he also did not acknowledge.

Challenges

Mason reported the vocabulary work in science and social studies both to be challenging and mentioned the difficulty of dealing with so many "new words" each time we spoke (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15; 4/7/15; 4/22/15). Between these two classes, Mason did indicate a greater level of comfort in social studies where he was allowed to work with a peer to complete a fill-in-the-blank style paragraph with a word bank featuring terms about the Dakota War, "My partner and me are like reviewing through the words, like team work because I knew some of them, what it meant, some of the words" (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15). Though he and his partner got through only half of the items before the eight-minute work period was up, Mason was able to follow along

while Mr. Stanford read through the answers and add the correct responses to his own sheet (Field Notes, 3/19/15; Mason, Interview, 4/22/15).   In science, Mason reported concerns about the vocabulary more consistently, particularly in terms of material presented by video and stressed that he was not allowed to ask for help during the video quizzes because they were treated like tests (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15; 4/7/15). He expressed concern that he received failing grades on these quizzes despite reporting that Ms. Tompkins "says it's okay if we fail 'cause they're like new words and we're learning about them this week" (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). Neither my observations, nor the class grade reports reflect any explicit teaching of vocabulary or additional post-test measures used in to confirm understanding.

Mason also struggled with using new vocabulary expressively in his writing. Though limited extended writing was observed in any core classes during my observation period, Mr. Stanford confirmed that social studies tests often required short essay questions that required students to tell the "story" of the content studied (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). Mr. Stanford recognized Mason's effort but that he often did not understand or use the words correctly in his responses:

> Sometimes I get his answers and I'll read his answers, and I was like 'Nnn, this isn't what I was asking' but what he did then was he probably pulled out some knowledge he knew. He probably caught a word and thought, 'well, I'll just write about that.' Sometimes he's lucky in that sense and he wrote just enough and other times he's way off… way off. (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15)

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Like extended writing, minimal independent academic reading was observed in Mason's core classes and it was observed exclusively in science. In science, Mason had to independently read a recent issue of *Science World* (Scholastic, March 23, 2015), a publication geared towards students in grades 6-10, and complete a two-sided worksheet, answering four different sections of comprehension questions (Field Notes, 3/24/15). Even with briefer texts, such as the science video quiz sheets, Mason reported finding reading a paragraph or two of academic text to be challenging (Mason, 4/7/15). This compounded the difficulty Mason experienced with the new vocabulary words and the pressure he felt because the sheets were counted as quiz grades and students were not allowed to ask for help.

Mason also felt that these science video quizzes challenged him because they went through content too quickly. He noted, "we were going to understand the guy, but he was talking so fast" (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). I observed that Mason often appeared to have difficulty keeping up with the pace of class when directions were given in his core classes. One example of this in science class was when Ms. Tompkins introduced a video about energy and the related quiz sheet. She asked students to take two minutes to read through the questions; Mason had already collected the sheet but was busy organizing his materials and did not appear to look at it during this time. Then, Ms. Tompkins gave specific directions to class to write point values next to different questions so that they would know how many answers to give (e.g., 5 points = 5 reasons, etc.). Mason did not begin doing this when directed. When he began to, he was in the wrong spot and, without realizing, continued incorrectly (Field Notes, 3/27/15). Pace

was also a challenge in terms of Mason's writing. According to Mr. Stanford, this was also a concern in social studies where it took "him a lot longer with these tests and quizzes" (Stanford, 3/20/15). Because he had not finished the last chapter test within the given class period, Mason missed nearly thirty minutes of instruction, including vocabulary review, to finish his test during a later class (Field Notes, 3/19/15).

The circumstances of Mason's home life indirectly affected his participation in his core classes, particularly his lack of access to the internet and his math class. In an effort to move towards a flipped classroom, Ms. Monahan assigned videos for students to watch outside of class and use the Cornell note-taking strategy to process information on their own before coming to class to practice (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15). While Mason never appeared to be lost or particularly behind his classmates, he tended to pay close attention to Ms. Monahan's warm-ups on the white board and homework reviews on the Smart Board. His grades in math were negatively affected by Mason's inability to complete the homework assignment; it was unclear to what extent his comprehension of the subject was affected.

Strategies

Math was the only core class where I observed Mason actively ask for help. As Ms. Monahan noted, he was so interested in learning the content that he was willing to ask peers or ask her for help when he needed it. Mason's effort in general was more apparent in math than in either of his other core classes. In science and social studies, Mason's participation could easily be described as "flying under the radar" as he did not volunteer anything and was rarely observed to interact with either the teacher or his

peers. Mason's demonstration of effort in these two classes often related to his organizational skills. In order to appear engaged and as though he was doing what he needed to, Mason would spend extra time filing and organizing papers into his binder. He took time with this, especially during transitions between activities when he may not have had a clear understanding about what he was supposed to do next. When he believed he knew what he needed to do in these classes, he did make an observable effort to do it. For example, in science, he and one of the peers in his lab group for the Marble Roll project continued answering questions in their lab packets despite being reprimanded twice by the teacher not to do so (Field Notes, 3/17/15; 3/19/15).

In math, Ms. Monahan frequently called on Mason to help complete examples and answer questions (Field Notes, 3/19/15; 3/24/15; 3/27/15). This frequent prompting served to engage Mason and possibly made it easier for him to ask questions and give more discernable effort. During guided and independent practice activities, Ms. Monahan frequently circulated to help students throughout the room. Mason and the peers at his table were often talkative during these times, but this did not consistently appear to be in productive ways.

Supports

Mason was appreciative that longer texts in social studies were read aloud or played aloud on the iPad app and appeared to follow along some of the times when classmates around him volunteered to "read" the text this way (Field Notes, 3/19/15). Even shorter texts such as worksheets and study guide questions were often read aloud in social studies. Mr. Stanford felt strongly that in order for all students to comprehend

texts, it was important to read them aloud (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). Ms. Monahan similarly read worksheet directions and word problems aloud in math class (Field Notes, 3/16/15; 3/24/15). She even read tests aloud to the class stating, "I'm going to read the test out loud because it is a math test, not a reading test. If you want to go at your own pace, you can" (Field Notes, 3/16/15)

Mason reported finding large classroom environments noisy, making it harder to hear what he needed to in order to learn (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15). In each of Mason's core classes he was one of 27 or 28 students. In science, he sat in the back row, farthest from where the teacher typically sat or stood. In social studies, several rows of students sat between him and the board. When text was projected on the board he sometimes did not appear to attend to it (Field Notes, 3/27/15) though the same thing was observed when he had an iPad and was listening to the text read aloud (Field Notes, 3/19/15). In math, Mason sat in a corner seat, closest to the Smart Board and the white board. In this class there was nearly always content being projected on the Smart Board or written on the white board and Mason took advantage of this location to attend closely to what Ms. Monahan displayed.

Of these three classes, math was also the context in which Mason was observed to interact and feel more comfortable with his peers. Though ostensibly some of this was the helping and asking for help that he and Ms. Monahan had both described, there were certainly off-task, social interactions as well. There was one day in this class that stood out as the only time I observed Mason act off-task in a "goofy" way, trying to gain peers attention and make them laugh (Field Notes, 3/24/15). There was a different mix of

students in this class than in his other core classes, including several students who regularly got in trouble. Mason never truly 'acted up' and was efficiently re-focused by the teacher, but the combination of a different peer group and a subject with which he felt more comfortable may have given Mason the opportunity to try out some different social identities here, in contrast to the value of "trying" that he often espoused.

Mason believed that his teachers knew how hard he tried and that he would advocate for what he needed; Ms. Monahan saw him this way in math stating, "Whatever he's learned to do to cope, he seems to be doing pretty well" (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15). Mason believed that his teachers could recognize when he needed help and though Ms. Monahan appeared to agree with this sentiment, Mr. Stanford did not. In social studies, Mr. Stanford found Mason, "very quiet and reserved, so I don't get that much from him" (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). This description is consistent with my observations of Mason in both social studies and science classes. While Mr. Stanford did recognize that Mason had a difficult time expressing his understanding of the content in class, he did not know to what he should attribute this difficulty. Understanding Mason to be an ESL student (which he was) but not acknowledging his special education identification, Mr. Stanford explained, ""this is the problem with our ESL. Sometimes we don't know if it is truly they're having a difficult time reading it or if it's the language that they're having a difficult time with" (Stanford, 3/20/15). Either way, Mr. Stanford was not observed to make any special effort to engage Mason or check his comprehension during class.

Mason's Participation in Support Class Contexts

Strengths

In his three support classes, Mason maintained his positive demeanor. In each class there were one or two students who he appeared to talk with more casually. His teachers found him, "pretty easy going" and added that "he doesn't really act out. He's just a good kid" (Ritter, 4/7/15). In these classes of 6 – 12 students, the confidence that Mason told me about in his interviews was more apparent. Ms. Kendall remarked in a surprised manner that Mason's difficulties in reading had not yet appeared to affect his confidence, though she acknowledged that in the small class setting where she taught him, it might simply be a matter of him recognizing that he is one of the stronger students in the class (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15). Ms. Nash's observations of Mason in her Academic Language Preparation (ALP) class contradict this confident, positive self-image somewhat. She suggested, "I think he also knows from previous grading or previous classes that his work isn't stellar therefore he never purposely volunteers for anything" (Nash, 4/7/15). I observed Mason to be positively engaged in the ALP class, but not participating as actively or exuberantly as he did in his Special Education Language Arts (SELA) and Special Education School Strategies (SESS) class.

Mason's positive identity as a reader was reinforced in his support classes, in particular language arts as he had the opportunity to read a text of his choice independently each day. Ms. Ritter encouraged Mason and his five classmates to share personal connections that they made during this time. Though students were asked to write these connections on personal white boards, Mason was not the only student I

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observed to do this in an abbreviated manner before erasing the message and elaborating when speaking about his connection (Field Notes, 3/19/15). Mason was also not the only student reading a graphic novel from the manga series *Bleach*. After reading through the character descriptions inside the cover, Mason turned to a student seated behind him reading a later book in the series and asked a question (Field Notes, 3/20/15). A sign at the door of the ALP class indicated the directions "Bring your book. We read every day," but I did not observe Mason reading in this class. One day, students who finished the classwork assignment early were directed to take out a library book or choose one from the classroom library; along with this, the teacher provided commentary on the students' book selections, praising "real books" that avoided illustrations because graphic novels would not be acceptable during fourth quarter, in preparation for seventh grade (Field Notes, 3/20/15). Not only did Mason not appear to have time to read in ALP, the books he selected were not valued there.

Mason's sense of pride in what he understood as grade level reading was both reinforced and challenged in his support classes. Reading selections in these classes were often simplified or chosen based on students' reading levels, particularly in SESS and SELA (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15; Ritter, Interview, 4/7/15). Success with these texts likely supported Mason's sense of accomplishment as a reader. On the other hand, Mason's teachers were aware that he was not reading at grade level. "He's not at grade six level, he's definitely lower," Ms. Nash reported (Interview, 4/7/15). Ms. Kendall suggested his performance "as far as reading and writing, he's at more of an upper elementary level" (Interview, 3/26/15). Ms. Ritter reported informal reading inventory

results that confirmed this; using the Qualitative Reading Inventory word list, she determined his instructional level was at the 4th grade level; at the beginning of the year it was at the 3rd grade level. It is not clear to what extent, if at all Mason was aware of this assessment data.

The dual nature of Mason's organizational skills was highlighted in his support classes, particularly Special Education School Strategies. In one regard, Mason was missing a lot of assignments; however, he was very aware of the work that he owed. Each week, Thursday in this class was "Homework Day," a time when Ms. Kendall and the class paraprofessional, Ms. T, helped students with work from their other courses. Ms. Kendall initiated this time by providing students with printouts of their grade reports, including missing assignments for each of their classes. This information was also accessible to students and their families through the school's online grading portal. For students who had most of their classes in special education resource settings, there were often fewer assignments to complete because much of the work was done in class. Mason, who took three core classes on the Gold Team, consistently had a lot of missing assignments, according to Ms. Kendall and as she stated directly, "He doesn't do any homework at home" (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15). When she distributed the grade report sheets, students with no missing assignments did not receive them and were allowed to use the Chromebooks to play math games. When Mason received his he spent a long time reading and rereading the sheet, asserting to both Ms. T and Ms. Kendall that he had done certain assignments and waiting for their confirmation before crossing the assignments out. He talked with Ms. Kendall about prioritizing his assignments and she

asked what materials or support he needed. He also talked with Ms. T about an unrelated issue that he was having in school. While he talked, he folded the paper, made marks, and moved it around his desk, nearly thirty minutes of class time passed before Mason borrowed headphones and a Chromebook to watch one of the math videos that he could not access at home. He took a few notes on a sheet of loose-leaf paper but did not have time to finish this assignment before class ended (Field Notes, 3/19/15). Ms. Kendall indicated that despite this pattern of missing work, Mason displayed a relative strength in his organizational skills as well as his honesty:

> A lot of students don't know what they're missing or claim they left it at home or lost it. Mason always has it, knows how to access it. He's just, "I didn't do it. I don't do homework at home," kind of thing. But he seems organized enough that he can find his notes, find what he needs. He remembers how to log onto his Google classroom and videos. (Kendall, 3/26/15)

Mason carried this knowledge of which assignments he had done (and not done) the next day to his ALP class. While he was supposed to be independently working on an assignment, Mason retrieved and carefully reviewed his notebook to find two assignments he knew to be there.   While the teacher was working at her computer, Mason got her attention to initiate a conversation about his missing work:

> Mason: It says I'm missing A and B, but I'm only missing C
>
> Ms. Nash: If they're not graded then I couldn't find them…
>
> Mason: They're right here, you graded them.
>
> Ms. Nash: Okay, I'll check.

Ms. Nash continued working on her computer and began to call out to other students which assignments they were missing. Mason got to work on his assignment (Field Notes, 3/20/15). Despite this, Ms. Nash did not see Mason as a student who was interested in his academic success. She explained, "I don't really think he cares. I think he, right now he has managed to get a passing grade, he's over 60… is [a] follower. He doesn't advocate for himself and he doesn't express for himself very well" (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15).

Though Mason's academic participation might be questionable, his social participation in these support class contexts was more consistent. As Mason did with me when we first met, he shared personal stories with his teachers and peers, often within the structure of the class. In SELA when invited to share about their independent reading, Mason asked the Ms. Ritter if students could also share about their plans for the upcoming weekend (Field Notes, 3/20/15). After a discussion about arriving to school on time in ALP, Mason volunteered a story about a time when his bus had been dramatically late (Field Notes, 3/19/15). He also asked teachers more personal questions to make connections as when he asked Ms. Ritter if she attended church (Field Notes, 3/19/15) and Ms. Nash what her plans for spring break were (Field Notes, 3/27/15). He responded to what they shared with anecdotes about his personal experiences. Mason's memory was evident in this exploration of social connections in his support classes.

Challenges

Vocabulary instruction was different in Mason's support classes. In all three classes, students were exposed to words in nonfiction texts and supported in

understanding them. In SESS students were typically provided with explanations for words they did not know (Field Notes, 3/17/15). In SELA and ALP, students spent more time examining the morphological structure and phonetic pronunciation of words (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15; Ritter, Interview, 4/7/15). It did not appear that Mason made any direct connections between this type of word study and the difficulties that he experienced with remembering new words. When asked if he rehearsed his content vocabulary with teachers or peers in his support classes, Mason answered, "No. Only myself. I like keep saying it in my brain" (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15).

Mason also worked on spelling in his SELA class as part of the prescribed *LANGUAGE!* curriculum. Though I did not observe these, Ms. Ritter reported that the class took spelling tests on 15 words, approximately once a month and that Mason typically got 13-14 correct (Ritter, Interview, 4/17/15). Mason received other support while incorporating vocabulary in his writing in his SESS class. When writing his retelling of a legend from class readings, Mason recalled a great number of details about the story of Medusa. He completed the pre-writing sheet with minimal assistance (Field Notes, 3/18/15) and then began to write his rough draft independently (Field Notes, 3/23/15). After declining general offers of help, Mason accepted Ms. Kendall's offer to sit with him and write down the character names to help with the spelling of vocabulary specific to this story (Field Notes, 3/23/15). In ALP where Mason was more likely to work independently, Ms. Nash explained that sometimes when she goes to check on his work, "I'll look at what he's doing and I won't understand a single thing" (Nash,

Interview, 4/7/15) suggesting that the type of assistance Ms. Kendall offered might be valuable to Mason in this context too.

Ms. Nash particularly noted the reading comprehension work Mason had done independently as examples of work that was difficult for her to decipher (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15); these were also a number of the assignments that he had not turned in (Grade Report, 4/7/15). Ms. Nash described this work the class had done with *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000), primarily when she was out of the room conducting ACCESS testing. She had instructed the substitute teacher to read five pages aloud to students every day and then allow them to read the remainder of the chapter and answer two or three comprehension questions on their own (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15). None of the academic reading activities in Special Education School Strategies or language arts were observed to be completed independently.

Because so much classwork was led together, students in Ms. Ritter's language arts class worked at similar paces. Mason, she noted, worked "A little slower, not too slow that I'm worried, he's often one of the later ones but not the last" (Ritter, Interview, 4/7/15). On some occasions, he was even the first to finish short assignments in this group (Field Notes, 3/20/15). I observed the same of Mason's participation in SESS and ALP- he was often one of the later students to complete work, but not the last.

Both Ms. Kendall and Ms. Ritter noted that Mason actively participated in class except for "days when he's tired and he doesn't" (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15). In SESS, Mason's body language occasionally conveyed that he was tired which he confirmed when Ms. Kendall asked (Mason, Interview, 3/18/15). Ms. Ritter also observed that

'"Every once in a while he'll have an off day or two if he's tired or hungry" (Ritter, Interview, 4/7/15). In SESS, Mason shared with Ms. Kendall and Ms. T that his bus often arrived at the school late in the morning and prevented him from eating breakfast in the cafeteria. When Ms. Kendall suggested he get his breakfast and bring it to class with him, he explained that his first period teacher would not allow him to eat in the room; Ms. Kendall promised to address this with Mason's teacher (Field Notes, 3/19/15). Several days later, Ms. Ro brought a box of granola bars into language arts class, offered one to Mason, and stored the rest in a cabinet for him to have in the future, saying something discreetly to him about being worried about his lunch (Field Notes, 3/24/15). Though feeling tired or hungry would certainly influence Mason throughout the day, it appeared that he was able to express this more comfortably in some of his Support classes and receive assistance and sympathy.

Special Education School Strategies was also a place where Mason was allotted time to watch the math videos on the internet that he was not able to watch at home. Ms. Kendall reported trying to make sure that Ms. T was available to, "pull him out and check in with him" though this was not always observed (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15). Though utilizing the internet resource during this time was one way for Mason to get caught up with missing assignments, watching the video and taking notes was also something he could do independently (Field Notes, 3/19/15). However, at Mason's pace, having this opportunity once a week was not sufficient for him to get caught up with the number of videos he was expected to watch (Grade Report, 4/7/15). By using his

"Homework Day" time this way, Mason missed opportunities to get support with other assignments that he may have found too challenging to tackle on his own.

Strategies

Part of Mason giving his best effort included masking his difficulties through keeping up appearances, even in these smaller classes intended to support him. As Ms. Nash noted, "he doesn't outwardly show his difficulties... He'll sit there and he'll work" (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15). She also praised him in class for his work ethic, and explained that he could be a positive influence on his peers in group work settings (Field Notes, 3/27/15). In class, Mason demonstrated the kind of student that he believed his teachers wanted him to be through this effort. When writing his legend retelling in SESS, Mason held up his paper multiple times to show peers, and teachers how much he had written, equating output with effort (Field Notes, 3/23/15). Mason's teachers understood that the classroom walls were the limits of Mason's efforts. As Ms. Nash noted that Mason did not appear to care about making up missed assignments for her class, Ms. Kendall agreed that Mason did not take advantage of all of the opportunities he had to get assistance with his work.

> He's also not a student who's going to see that he got a poor grade and advocate for himself and ask to make test corrections. That also might include staying after school for re-teaching and he's not interested in that...He wants to be successful, but he doesn't want to work *too* hard to be successful. (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15).

Though I observed Mason to ask for help in each of his support classes, he seemed to avoid this when possible. Ms. Kendall described him as "one of those kids who likes to say 'I get it. I don't have any questions'" (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15) and Ms. Nash similarly felt that "he doesn't want you to single him out. He doesn't want to feel like he's not keeping up" (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15). Ms. Ritter noted some variability in Mason's question-asking, explaining,

> He does and he doesn't. It kind of depends on the day or whatever is going on. He will ask for help, but sometimes he'll just stop and instead of ask for help he'll wait for someone to help him. (Ritter, Interview, 4/7/15).

This latter strategy seemed to be more Mason's typical manner of participating in these support classes. In ALP, Mason asked the teacher for help on the "School Start Time" close reading assignment. As she began to walk away after talking with the student seated next to Mason, Mason raised his hand to ask for her help on the last two questions saying, "I don't get them" (Field Notes, 3/20/15). She stood next to him, read through the questions, explained what it meant that he needed to make inferences, and read selected parts of the text aloud. She paraphrased key parts of the text and indicated that he should mark those parts to look back at to find his answers. Then she took a pencil from his desk and marked the text herself. She followed a similar procedure for the second question and asked "got it?" before walking back to her desk (Field Notes, 3/20/15). Possibly because of smaller class sizes, smaller classrooms, and higher teacher: student ratio Mason's passive approach was more effective in these classroom contexts as Mason was frequently offered this type of heavily guided assistance.

Supports

During the legends unit, Ms. Kendall had presented several legends by reading them aloud. Students had copies of the texts in front of them and were invited to read along. Mason and one other student volunteered to read in this small group and did so relatively fluently (Field Notes, 3/17/15). In contrast, Ms. Nash explained that she was informed students were not to read text aloud; she continued to ask for volunteers but indicated this was against what she was told, "that's no longer an approved way of reading. You don't have the students read aloud" (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15). Instead, Ms. Nash read some text aloud and assigned students to read some independently. Academic text in language arts was read aloud by Ms. Ritter; Ms. Ritter and the class paraprofessional, Ms. Ro frequently sat down with individual students to reread questions or specific sections of their short texts as needed (Field Notes, 3/19/15).

The small physical classroom environments that Mason preferred described his Special Education School Strategies and language arts classrooms, which were in actuality, the same room. This resource room, approximately one-third the size of a standard classroom at HMS held six tables with two chairs each. Due to its narrow shape, all seats were close to the board offering proximity to the teacher and projected content (Field Notes, 3/17/15). Despite having only twelve students enrolled in the class, ALP took place in a standard-sized classroom, possibly contributing to Mason's categorization of it as a "regular" class (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15).

The social environment that his support class teachers have fostered appear to make Mason feel more comfortable as well. In particular, Mason reported finding Special

Education School Strategies class "fun" and enjoying the "friend time" Ms. Kendall

provided, likely referring to the embedded social skills curriculum (Mason, Interview,

4/22/15). Of the six classroom environments where I observed Mason, this was the one

where I witnessed the most positive participation. When I asked Mason, he confirmed

this explaining, "I just feel like because I know everybody, I know everybody so I feel

more comfortable" (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15).

Though Mason himself was not aware of why he was in each of his support

classes (Mason, Interview, 4/22/15), his teachers understood how he met the criteria to be

there and were well aware of the academic difficulties he experienced and the amount of

help he needed. One example of their expertise was in SELA when Mason paused in his

writing and Ms. Ro offered to take over writing for him. Mason and Ms. Ritter

simultaneously declined the offer and Ms. Ritter helped Mason get going again with a

simple prompting question (Field Notes, 3/19/15). While Ms. Nash did not seem to be

aware that Mason was a student with an identified specific learning disability (SLD) in

reading (Field Notes, 3/19/15), she recognized that his difficulties extended beyond the

usual scope of her students:

> I don't think his problems are ESL or second language oriented. I think he's
>
> probably more comfortable in English than he is in Spanish…. I think he has
>
> more true difficulty but he doesn't show it. He has found ways… because he's
>
> quiet, he doesn't volunteer anything. (Nash, Interview, 4/7/15)

Mason confirmed her suspicion when he explained to me that although his first

words were in English, he mostly spoke Spanish at home with his mother. She had

taught him to read in Spanish as well, but he said that he did not practice or do that anymore (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). Ms. Kendall similarly did not see language as an obstacle for Mason, suggesting he presented as a student who was "typical SLD" where his difficulties were related to "something in his brain... processing" and unlike a number of the other students she taught, he didn't "have behaviors impeding his learning" (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15).

Mason in Terms of School Identifications and Metrics

In his elementary school year, Mason's report cards reflect fairly consistent work in the areas of reading, writing, and content area vocabulary (see Table 3.5). This consistency might be related to having positive relationships with classroom teachers who looped with him in first and second grade and fourth and fifth grade.

Table 3.5 Summary of Mason's elementary report cards based on an average of trimester grades

		Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5
Reading	Reads grade level material	1.67	2	2	2	2
	Understands what is read	2	2	2	2	2
	Applies Early Reading Strategies	2	2	NA	NA	NA
	Reads fluently with expression	2	2	2	2	2
	Demonstrates positive reading habits	3	3	2	2	2
Writing	Expresses ideas in writing/speaking	2.33	2	2.67	2	2
	Organizes writing	2	2	2	2	2
	Uses writing conventions	2.33	2.33	2	2	2
	Word study (includes spelling)	2.33	3	2	2	2
Science	Critical Skills and Vocabulary	NA	NA	1.67	2.33	2.67
Social Studies	Critical Skills and vocabulary	NA	NA	2.5	NA	3

Key: 4= performing beyond grade level expectations, 3= performing at grade level, 2= progressing with teacher support, 1= requires a high level of practice and teacher support

Based on these evaluations, Mason has never been considered to be a grade level reader. His performance has been relatively consistent across areas and grade levels with some relative strengths in the expressive areas of writing/speaking in the grades 1-2 and content vocabulary in grades 3-5.

Mason's academic performance in sixth grade (so far) as measured by letter grades suggested that has he maintained consistently higher grades in his Special Education Language Arts and Special Education School Strategies classes than in his general education core classes or his Academic Language Preparation class (see Table 3.6). Mason explained that he "only" gets B's and C's unless he doesn't have the internet which affects his ability to do math homework, resulting (he predicted) in a grade of C- or D (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15). Despite receiving weekly reports about his missing assignments, Mason did not, at the end of the quarter, appear certain about the grades he would be receiving (Mason, Interview, 4/7/15); his general estimation of B's and C's did not appear consistent with the grades he had received in his core classes or ALP. It is unclear if he believed not having the internet at home affected his grades in other ways that I did not observe.

Table 3.6 Mason's 6th grade Report Card

	Q1	Q2	Q3*
Social Studies	C-	C-	F
Science	C-	D	D
Math	C	B-	D-
Special Education Language Arts	B	B-	B-
Special Education School Strategies	A	B+	A-
Academic Language Preparation	C-	F	D-

Results of Mason's bi-annual NWEA assessment reflected consistent growth from second through fourth grade (see Table 3.7). Since the spring of his fourth grade year, Mason has scored at or above the 50th percentile on the Math portion of the assessment. This may be consistent with Mason's identification that he was "so smart" in math, as his Math scores have consistently exceeded his Reading scores. Despite this area of relative strength, these scores do not qualify him for an honors math class at HMS.

Table 3.7. Mason's NWEA Scores in Reading and Math (Fall 2010 – Spring 2014)

Grade	Season	Reading		Math	
		RIT	%ile	RIT	%ile
5	S14	200	19	228	68
	F13	186	7	213	50
4	S13	196	22	213	51
	F12	165	1	197	30
3	S12	175	5	196	29
	F11	156	1	187	34
2	S11	160	2	186	34
	F10	150	5	174	37

Like all EL students in the Highland District, Mason was annually assessed on the WIDA English Language proficiency standards (Table 3.8).   Mason's performance on the ACCESS test in his fifth grade year suggested his verbal English skills (Listening and Speaking) were stronger than his print-related skills (Reading and Writing). His expressive language skills (Speaking and Writing) appeared to be more similar than his receptive language skills (Listening and Reading).

Table 3.8. Mason's ACCCESS scores from the end of his 5th grade year (May 2014)

Language Domain	Score (out of 6)	Descriptor (Entering – Reaching)
Listening	5	Bridging
Speaking	4.5	Expanding – Bridging
Reading	3.9	Developing – Expanding
Writing	4.2	Expanding – Bridging

Mason was identified as eligible for special education services as a student with a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading and writing during the spring of his second grade year. Initial eligibility assessments as well as updated triennial re-evaluations reflect Average scores on measures of nonverbal intelligence (CTONI) and on mathematics areas of the WJ-III Achievement tests in contrast with Low Average and Low scores on reading and writing subtests. These achievement discrepancies in the areas of basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, and written expression were accompanied by an identified weakness in information processing. For several years, Mason's Individual Education Plan (IEP) included four goals in the areas of phonics and word analysis, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, and written language. Progress was monitored and reported through the IEP quarterly using primarily informal and teacher-made measures; results were not readily available, nor were they reported to Mason or his teachers.

What do these data suggest about Mason's identification as a student with a reading disability and his access to 6th grade curriculum? **Psychometric assessments of ability and achievement conducted every three years constructed Mason as a student with a reading disability at Highland Middle School.** Highland District's

criteria for determining a student's eligibility for special education services indicate that Mason, who was found eligible in elementary school, will not be retesting until the end of his eighth grade year, as he prepares for high school. Results of the ACCESS test placed Mason in an Academic Language Preparation 3/4 class and suggest that, if the class were aligned to the WIDA ELD standards, that he should excel. HMS's master schedule was largely responsible for the contexts in which Mason received instruction. Many students in his special education classes had one teacher, either Ms. Ritter or Ms. Kendall for both their language arts and their Special Education School Strategies courses. Other students at HMS received coordinated ESL and special education services through co-taught language arts classes.

Mason Across Contexts

To further corroborate, contradict, or complicate Mason's description of his participation, I now explore how the strengths, challenges, strategies, and supports that Mason identified for himself were evident across Core and Support class contexts (see Figure 3.6 below).

Strengths	Strategies
Positive	Asking for help
Organization	"Doing effort"
Memory	

Challenges	Supports
Independent academic reading	Structuring of reading assignments
Content vocabulary reading & writing	Structuring physical environment
Pace/time	Structuring social environments
Home circumstances	Teacher knowing when help is needed

	Observed similarly across contexts
	Observed only in core contexts
	Observed only in support contexts
	Observed in both/ mixed within core & support contexts

Figure 3.6. Mason's participation as observed in core and support contexts

Mason did not indicate whether he had any sense of what his teachers knew about his identification as a student with a reading disability or as a student who was an English Learner. When I asked why he was in the ESL class, he did not know. As far as his special education identification, Ms. Kendall explained that many of her sixth grade students were not aware that they were in special education programs because these services had been well-integrated in their elementary schools; she believed it likely that Mason did not know he was in special education before she explained this to the class earlier in the year (Kendall, Interview, 3/26/15). Mason never used school identifications such as EL, ESL, SLD, or special education when talking about himself, his classes, or his teachers. It is unclear if Mason was familiar with these terms or if he understood the support classes he attended in different ways. It is further hard to know which, if either, of these identifications plays a role in shaping Mason's identities as a learner and reader.

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Mason's skills support, contradict, and complicate the positive, confident identity that he presented. Standardized assessment data suggested Mason had good reason to feel confident in his math skills; the anticipation of receiving a lower grade in this course than expected for the third quarter did not appear to affect him as he attributed this to factors outside of his control. His math teacher Ms. Monahan agreed that his comprehension of the subject was on grade level, "I know that he's getting help for reading and writing but I'm not really seeing that much difference in his abilities than some of the other kids" (Monahan, Interview, 3/24/15).

Mason's sense of reading growth in the past as well as his continued positive reading behaviors of checking out books, bringing them home, and sharing details of what he reads are fostered in his language arts class where he may exhibit stronger skills than some of his peers. Similarly he enjoyed texts of interest in Special Education School Strategies and subsequently was willing to take risks reading aloud with a comfortable peer group. These experiences seem in contrast to what assessments of his reading skills might suggest. In contexts where Mason needed to rely on those skills more independently such as ALP and science class, Mason did poorly on assignments, felt challenged by the vocabulary and pace of the content, and did not ask for help as often.

Mason also took pride in his writing, in particular when he was able to produce a lot of text. For several assignments, he actually produced more written text than was required, receiving reprimands from the teacher in both science and ALP for not following directions. Consistent with assessment data, teachers across contexts sometimes found the spelling and mechanics of Mason's written work difficult to

interpret though he consistently performed well on in-class spelling assessments in language arts.

When it came to reading and writing, Mason's teachers had some conflicting ideas about what kind of learning challenges Mason experienced. Across contexts, teachers made a point to establish that he was not in any way a student whose behavior impeded his learning. Mr. Stanford seemed to understand that Mason was an ESL student but was not sure if the difficulty he exhibited on social studies tests was due to his language skills or his reading skills (Stanford, Interview, 3/20/15). Ms. Nash believed his learning difficulties were not due to English Learner issues, but also did not appear to be aware of Mason's identified SLD. Mason's special education teachers, on the other hand, felt that his learning disability was obvious in his reading and written work.

Mason's belief in his own effort as a strategy for his success was evident throughout his day. In every class I observed him to be attentive, organized, and making an effort to keep up with instruction. He was more successful with this on some days and in some contexts more than others. In science he did better on lab days than on video quizzes; in SESS his efforts were more effective with new content than completing homework. In each class, each day there were likely factors (some invisible to me) that influenced to what degree Mason's efforts would be successful, but this did not shake his belief that trying his best would help him reach his goal of higher education in a trade like automotive mechanics or a creative field such as video game design.

Though his home literacy practices were outside the scope of this study, there seemed to be tension between Mason's proclamations of liking to study and always

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trying his best with the apparent reality that he rarely did school work at home. When he was honest with Ms. Kendall about not doing homework at home this may have provided an interesting glimpse at what Mason felt his "best" might be. It might be that after seven hours, six of them academic, receiving different vocabulary words and different messages about how to practice literacy that Mason's "best" was helping his family and reading his graphic novels for pleasure.

Discussion

What do classroom literacy practices look like for the two sixth grade students identified as "struggling readers" in this study?

Teaching Reading and Teaching Disciplinary Literacies

Middle school structures typically exist such that support classes are the context in which to remediate foundational reading skills that students might still need and that core classes are the context to begin introducing students to the genres and ways of knowing most relevant to their disciplines. This distinction is visible but not entirely fixed in the classes Lauren and Mason attended. In science, Ms. Tompkins shared lab packets that structured the reading and writing students did around the steps of the scientific process. In social studies, Mr. Stanford modeled interpreting text to modify maps as well as illustrating the ways that the geographical features in the maps affected the "story" he was explaining. In language arts, Ms. Miller described and modeled the way that poems should be read differently from other texts. With the exception of content vocabulary instruction in core contexts, no foundational literacy skill instruction was observed. In the support classes that had more prescribed curricula, these programs

provided skill intervention directly (as in General Education Reading Intervention) or indirectly through shared texts (as in Special Education School Strategies and Special Education Language Arts). For similar reasons of desiring to engage students with curriculum closer to what they perceived to be grade level content, all three teachers supplemented their instruction with strategies that they believed with be helpful in language arts reading and writing. While reviewing story elements and teaching active reading comprehension strategies may have been helpful to students when they returned to their core classes, these topics did not match the curricula currently being taught in those contexts. The lack of immediate relevance may have tempered the benefits students derived from these experiences.

Context Matters, but not as Much as the Local Construction of Situated Literacy Practices.

Though Core classes were grouped for the purpose of this analysis, the students in this study demonstrated clear differences in the ways in which they viewed the literacy practices in each classroom. Students' participation was shaped by both the skills required of each practice as well as the social ways that the community was constructed around and through the practice. Lauren, the "struggling reader" in many ways appeared most comfortable in her social studies class where she read and listened to extended texts and wrote longer responses on tests. Mason, the student with a reading disability, actively shared independent reading connections in language arts and volunteered to read in front of his peers in his Special Education School Strategies class. Both of these students reported being most challenged by trying to learn from videos in science class,

an assignment intended to ease the burden of difficult technical reading. This paradox was particularly notable as science also boasted frequent opportunities engage with peer groups in hands-on tasks with minimal reading and writing.

The four Support classes described also provided different opportunities for students based on the ways that literacy practices were locally situated. For example, independent reading in GERI allowed Lauren to engage in a text of her choice for 20-25 minutes each day and share a structured, written response with a teacher once a week. Independent reading in her language arts class was presented as a suggested activity for school vacation rather than a constructed classroom practice. Independent reading in SELA allowed Mason to engage in a text of his choice for five minutes each day and share connections with his peers. Independent reading in ALP was a less consistent practice that Mason was not observed to have the opportunity to participate in during this period. Incongruities in these practices within Support contexts and bridging Core and Support contexts suggested that the local constructions were more consequential for the students who experienced them.

How do these students participate in the practices? What are their perspectives about the different literacy practices they encounter in school?

"Do you mean my grades or how I act?": The Value of Academics vs. Behavior.

When we first met and I asked Lauren "What kind of student are you?" she quickly countered with this question, suggesting that academic performance and classroom behavior were two separate categories for her. Both Lauren and Mason

presented positive learner identities to their teachers in every class. While perhaps not personally identifying as readers, they engaged in many of the classroom literacy practices that their teachers expected of them, or perhaps more notably, they did not visibly disengage. This distinction was important because despite these students representing academic need, they were cooperative and pleasant and teachers did not necessarily give them extra attention in class. In the few instances that they were visibly off-task, they were not disruptive, nor were they argumentative when re-directed. Many of the students about whom teachers voiced concerns, to me and in Gold Team meetings, were characterized by these types of negative behaviors. Even the teachers who felt that Mason could be working harder or that Lauren could be more attentive consider both of these young people to be "good" students in terms of their behavior and do not seem overly concerned about the academic progress of either student. This may in some way be a matter of teachers equating compliance with learning and students equating effort with achievement.

This is not to say that Lauren and Mason did not demonstrate the complexity documented of middle school students with reading difficulties (Ivey, 1999). The strengths, challenges, strategies, and supports they provided to describe their perspectives of their participation were often, but not always corroborated by my observations and by their teachers. Mason had a tendency to generalize his positive beliefs about himself and his teachers while minimizing the things he found challenging, often attributing lack of success with things outside of his control. While he exhibited an excellent memory in many circumstances, at times the details he recalled did not seem to match. Lauren

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carefully weighed the experiences of her peers in conveying her own, describing discussions she had had with friends in her evaluations of assignments and teachers' practices, leaving me with questions about what she might be holding back. None of these observations question the overwhelmingly "good" nature of these students and the identities they enacted in their classes; they question assumptions about a singular presentation of learning identity when there is evidence supporting multiple or at least more nuanced identities.

My observations also called into question the utility for these students of simply maintaining a "good" student image. Certainly, flying under the radar may have met some of their social desires, but engaging in practices with this goal only in mind might compromise their opportunities to learn. Both Lauren and Mason volunteered curiosity for learning and more specifically learning things about how the world worked (Lauren) and how things used to be (Mason). These interests did not align with the books that they chose to read on their own, suggesting that they did not link their curious natures to a motivation to read. This combined with the way that both students dutifully completed their assignments to read and journal or keep a reading log but rarely volunteered anything about reading habits outside of this, suggests they were primarily focused on reading to complete assignments. Reading merely to complete an assignment is more closely aligned with compliance than curiosity and, therefore, less likely to lead to lifelong reading habits (Guthrie, 1996). While reading in ways that met their teachers' expectations, furthering the "good" student identities that they held, their choices may not have always supported their own growth as readers.

There are also tensions between the "good" behavior that these students exhibit and the types of behaviors that they would need to exhibit to be considered "good students" by others. Each student predominantly enacts a "good student" identity the best he or she knows how. These behaviors are generally recognized and reinforced by the teachers who describe them as "great" or "sweet kids." When they drifted from this path in small ways, they asked for directions to detention (as Mason did) or stay in to complete assignments at lunch (as Lauren did), and generally comply with what is asked of them. Neither student was observed to speak up, argue with teachers, nor act in attention-seeking ways as many of their peers were observed to do. While these behaviors garnered negative responses in the classrooms, they did often get responses. Lauren and Mason both tended towards passiveness in their interactions with their teachers; their teachers would prefer they were better self-advocates. It would appear that in many of the classrooms through which they traveled, the identity of "good student" meant not only speaking up for themselves but doing so in specific ways. This pushed the boundary of what these particular students were willing or able to do to enact the identity of "good student."

Mason established this boundary for himself by refusing to do homework at home. He expressed little dissonance over this and the fact that his aim was to work hard and make his parents and teachers proud, suggesting that it did not compromise his sense of being a good student. Lauren expressed a little more awareness that the ways she chose to act, particularly in language arts, were not necessarily in alignment with what her teachers expected of good students. While both students participated in ways that

allowed them to maintain the perception of being "good" students, they did not always choose to, know how to, or have the independent skills that might have established them as "good students."

How do school identifications of reading difficulties and reading disabilities apply to students in different classroom contexts?

"Struggling Readers" School Identifications and Difficulty or Disability Identities

While both students recognized that some aspects of reading and writing were challenging for them, in particular vocabulary, they did not appear to have internalized overly negative beliefs about themselves at this point. They enjoyed the opportunities to be in smaller support classes where they feel the teachers know them well and are positioned to help them. Neither expressed negative feelings about being in Support classes outside of the mainstream of exploratory coursework. Receiving academic support did not appear to be overly stigmatizing at Highland Middle School as it was available for many students through many channels. HMS was in the middle of adding more interventions to their master schedule both through general education and co-taught special education and ESL classes in an effort to reach all students, recognizing that with less than half of students scoring "proficient" on the state-standards reading test, students, overall were "not at the level" school administration wanted them to be (Alonso, Interview, 4/7/15).

School identifications and the assessment data that supported them became a part of students' identities mainly as they were interpreted through their class placements.

Lauren's scores on the Spring 2014 NWEA contributed both to her identification as a "struggling reader" and an honors math student. Of these two, the math placement appeared to be a stronger part of her identity as she communicated pride in doing more advanced work. The data that created Mason's SLD identification came from assessments originally occurring in second grade and updated in fifth grade. Neither these assessment data nor the subsequent SLD identification appeared to be particularly concerning to Mason. The one instance when he referred to the state-standards reading test, it was with the perspective that he scored how his teachers wanted him to (at the proficient benchmark).

In both Lauren's and Mason's cases, they exhibited stronger literacy skills than many of their peers in the smaller Support classes where they were scheduled, possibly reinforcing their own positive feelings about receiving academic support. With these two students, the relationship between their confidence and skills was not always clearly correlated. Mason demonstrated more confidence in his abilities though presented with more limited skills. Lauren appeared to doubt herself and give up more easily despite performing on grade level in many ways. Teachers often compare students to their peers in a given classroom. In small support classes, Lauren and Mason were seen as skilled compared to their peers. Though when making these comparisons, specific data were not cited; teachers may have been referring to their independent work skills and compliant behaviors that characterized these students as "good." According to Ms. Monahan, Lauren appeared to struggle in honors math, surrounded by peers who caught on very quickly while in contrast she thought Mason was coping well in a class with numerous

behavior problems. Conversely, in social studies, Lauren's class had more behavior-related disruptions and Mr. Stanford identified Lauren as visibly positively engaged. In Mason's class, he was easily able to hide behind students who consistently volunteered and performed well. As Lauren appeared to participate more actively in the classroom practices of social studies and Mason appeared to participate more actively in math, I have to question how they reflected their teachers' beliefs about them in other areas as well.

"She helps me with math; she believes in me": Trusting Their Teachers to Help Them

In Mason's original description of his teachers, he provided very general explanations like "she helps me" for most of them. For his math teacher, he elaborated, "She believes in me" (Mason, Interview, 3/16/15) indicating that this relationship with his teacher is part of the support that he really valued. Ultimately both Lauren and Mason believed that their teachers would help them when they needed it. Both students recognized that their teachers would like them to advocate for themselves more productively, but neither appeared to feel this was necessary. In some contexts, such as Mason's SESS and SELA classes, he may have been justified in feeling this way as his special education teachers were acutely aware of his academic instructional levels. In other contexts, such as Lauren's GERI class, she may have felt this way because her teachers communicated data with her that conveyed both her own growth as a reader and their knowledge of her growing skills. In core class contexts, teachers were not equipped with the same amount of assessment data as the support class teachers had. While some

formative assessment practices were being introduced, they were not yet being used as indicators for re-evaluating teaching practices.

Future Directions with Research in this Area

This dissertation study depicts two students identified in different ways as "struggling readers" and the findings are by no means meant to be generalizable to other students who may struggle with reading for a particular reason or are identified in a particular way. The cases presented here are not intended to explain profiles of reading difficulty but rather explore the variability within two individual students and document how individual strengths and challenges may intersect with socially constructed classroom literacy practices.

An area of my analysis that received minimal treatment was understanding the ethnic and linguistic identities that Lauren and Mason may have claimed. I have no doubt that including these perspectives would possibly bring me closer to their experiences while inevitably complicating how I saw these students, as these identities likely intersected in different ways. As my analysis was guided by the topics that these students suggested, I did not introduce discussion of cultural, racial, gender, classed or other identities that existed in these classrooms because they did not, even when I observed them to be relevant to other students. Acknowledging my role in the design of this qualitative research, I recognize that a different set of questions may have created spaces for Lauren and Mason to talk about themselves differently in these ways. This is an area for future study.

Conclusion

One implication of this study in increased consideration for the role of assessment data in instructional decision-making. While it has been established as problematic when single data points, particularly standards-based assessments, are used to categorize students broadly (Franzak, 2006; Vasuvedan & Campano, 2009), Lauren and Mason's cases illustrated the utility of targeted assessment in contributing towards students' positive reading identities. Lauren did not understand the details of her monthly and quarterly assessment results in GERI class, but she did understand that she was getting better at reading, and that her teachers believed she was getting better at reading. Mason seemed largely unaware of assessment results in general, but was confident enough that some of his teachers, like Ms. Kendall in SESS, would provide him with material that he could read and that he volunteered to read to his class. Ms. Kendall was able to do this because of access to updated, informal assessment. Through her expert use of this data she not only bolstered Mason's belief in himself, she also gave him continued reason to trust her and continue working hard to maintain their positive teacher-student relationship.

Dependence on large-scale assessments alone, on the other hand, took decision-making out of teachers' hands. At HMS, assessment data, in particular the NWEA, was mostly used for programmatic decisions that constructed identifications for students. Using these assessment results as the primary arbiter of who would be an Honors Math Student and who would be a Struggling Reader removed teachers' agency. Lauren, given both of these identifications in her sixth grade year, likely would have received neither in

her fifth grade year if the same criteria were used. When asked if her progress and performance in these classes would qualify her to continue or exit either program the teachers could not tell me; they needed to wait for the more formal assessment results to make the decisions for them.

Assessment is not only an inevitable part of schooling, but a valuable one if used correctly. Assessment that is more likely to show readers who struggle that they can succeed with the right leveled texts and that their practice can pay off with growth are valuable to not only their skills but their reading identities. Correctly used, informal data can help to keep students moving forward towards short and long-term goals.

A second implication of this work is the consideration of the avenues for academic support and other types of intervention available to students in a middle school setting. Lauren appeared to benefit from reading skill interventions because she was willing to do the work, obediently. Mason similarly benefitted from some of his academic supports because of a willingness to do what his teachers asked. In many ways, these two were not the image that the phrase "middle school struggling readers" call to mind. While they were certainly not the only well-behaved students in their classrooms, there were other students who fulfilled the stereotypical behaviors of avoidance in class or were simply absent. Skill-based interventions led to positive outcomes for Lauren and Mason in terms of their skills and their reading identities. For students who did not begin in as positive of a position, what interventions might be helpful at the middle school level? If resistant identities prevent students from being willing to exert the effort that

students like Lauren and Mason did, what interventions are available to allow the students to intervene in how they see themselves as readers (Alvermann, 2001)?

As schools incorporate more and varied personnel on Student Assistance Teams and Problem-Solving Teams, there is hope that the use of the varied perspectives of students will allow for creative resolutions.   Consideration of the multiple ways that students are affected by both reading capabilities and social factors that position them requires more than skill assessment and intervention. Additional consideration must be given to interventions that address social and affective factors along with reading skills and strategies.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions

In what ways do locally constructed literacies enable or disable two struggling middle grades readers?

The three previous chapters in this dissertation have sought to answer this overarching question by exploring the literacy practices found in sixth grade classrooms. Specifically, I examined how two readers' skills and identities were and were not evidenced in their participation in different classroom contexts and theorized about the ways that teachers' beliefs about struggling readers might position them in response. Here I briefly summarize the findings across chapters to consider connections between them that might work towards this larger question.

Summaries and Connections

Chapter two, "Reconceptualizing Struggling Adolescent Readers and their Teachers" reviewed two well-established models for understanding reading disability and reading difficulties and critiqued their usefulness to classroom teachers. Models that attribute reading challenges to *skill deficits linked to cognitive processing deficits* perpetuated a dichotomous view of reading disability suggesting that students either can or cannot read. *Social models* purport that school culture, including its local and historical influences, determined whether what students can and cannot do is valuable and when these variations become labeled disabilities. Both of these conceptions located expertise about students' reading outside of the classroom and are therefore limited in utility. Examination of a third conception, *based on a model of disability theory* (Siebers, 2008), *suggests that a both/and approach, recognizes students' reading as influenced*

both by factors within themselves and contextual factors, and positioned students to be the experts of their own experiences and teachers to be responsive to them. In particular I suggested that teachers could bring this both/and perspective to the classroom by listening to students, differentiating fully, and creating community where all kinds of learning are valued. These three components are notable through their presence and absence in the literacy practices observed in chapter three the supports Lauren and Mason look for in their teachers in chapter four.

In order to understand how locally constructed literacies affected readers, chapter three, "Teachers' Constructions of Middle School Literacy Practices," described the literacy practices in three classes and examined the ways that they reflected the narratives of larger social institutions and yet were still situated uniquely within their classrooms. In the Highland Middle School culture, it was evident that teachers' knowledge of students' needs was often general and established by standardized assessments and demographic data rather than more specific knowledge of individual or small groups of students. By focusing on teachers' roles within these practices, I was able to see where well-intentioned practices sometimes fell short. Teams of teachers had so much scheduled collaboration time that they had little time to collaborate with specialists who worked with the same students. Teachers spent a lot of time and energy creating activities that they believed to be supportive and engaging but took few opportunities to listen to or survey students in terms of choosing topics and texts that were personally meaningful or bringing their expertise into the curriculum. Common pedagogies such as reading texts aloud or presenting concepts through audio/visual means may have helped

students access course content but these teaching tools limited students' opportunities to practice reading skills or explicitly learn about disciplinary genres through scaffolded instruction. By providing these accommodating practices for all students, not just those who needed them, teachers missed opportunities to differentiate effectively. Students answered questions in class, interacted with peers, and learned in group settings, but true communities of learners were seldom observed and discussions nearly always focused on getting the right answer. Despite these commonalities across classes, students were often asked to bring different skills and social identities to literacy practices in each class. Teachers missed opportunities to make curricular connections and cue students into the social skills that they needed to navigate similar practices with the same names in different contexts. Overall, there were many positive learning experiences, but also many instances when institutional influences played a much greater role in the design of instruction that students' literacy skills and identities.

In chapter four, "Two Struggling Readers Learning to Navigate Sixth Grade Literacies," Lauren and Mason described the ways that they participated in their Core and Support classes through the strengths and challenges they saw in themselves as well as their strategies and the supports that they relied on from teachers and peers in order to succeed. Both students clung to positive identities as "good" students even when they were in contexts that did not position them as "good students." Lauren and Mason often generalized positive experiences, such as ways teachers supported them, and specified negative experiences, such as science video quizzes, perhaps to minimize the impact these had on their identities. In terms of skills, both students expressed feeling

challenged by their vocabulary knowledge, particularly as a great deal of new content vocabulary was taught across multiple classes. Otherwise, these students did not reflect extensively on their literacy skills. In many ways, Lauren seemed more self-aware, acknowledging when her grades or behaviors might not match the "good" student identity that she claimed; however, she did not connect this mismatch to deficits in her skills. Mason was less straightforward, attributing poor grades to factors outside of his control while neglecting opportunities to work on assignments after school with a teacher or at home; he did not attempt to reconcile these actions with his goals to make his parents and teachers proud. Ultimately, neither student expressed significant frustration as both were perpetually confident that their teachers would recognize that they needed help, despite my observations to the contrary.

Key Findings Across Chapters

Looking across these three chapters, several key findings stand out. First, teachers drew upon very similar historical influences but created literacy practices that were locally situated, distinguished by both the skills required and the social practices or identities demanded by teachers in classroom settings. Though teachers relied on these institutional influences more notably than on their knowledge of students, each teacher's interpretation of the students he or she taught also shaped the literacies practiced, though not always in productive ways. Pedagogical practices based on accommodating perceived wide-spread skill deficits both neglected opportunities to teach relevant skills and ignored the differentiated needs of students. In part, this supports my theorizing that

teachers' who allow standardized assessment data to be the "expert" without question may not be well-positioned to make informed instructional decisions.

Second, as others have established, students considered to be struggling readers may present different reading behaviors and identities in different contexts (Dillon, 1989; Hall, 2007; Ivey, 1999). This study suggests that similar variations exists for students with identified Specific Learning Disabilities in reading as well. In the case of Mason, his documented difficulties with word recognition and reading fluency might have suggested that he would shy away from reading aloud to peers and may be more interested in having texts read aloud. In contrast, Mason volunteered to read to his SESS, class, supported by a carefully-selected, leveled text and a carefully-cultivated group environment. Though he liked it when the class read together, he appeared considerably less engaged when classmates used their iPad apps to play the social studies textbook aloud. This further supports my theorizing that teachers will benefit from listening to students as experts of their own experiences as these educators work to make differentiated decisions about how to create more supportive classroom contexts and engaging literacy practices.

Implications

As the key findings above intimate, one implication of this research is to suggest teachers benefit from taking a conscious view of the ways that their pedagogical practices are influenced by factors outside of their classrooms as well as how those practices are considerate of the students within their classrooms. As teachers design literacy practices, it should be with an awareness of the contexts in which they teach, both in terms of the

larger societal influences and those of their local communities. Further, literacy practices should be designed in consideration of the students who will participate in them and all of their complexly varied skills and identities.

Teachers' knowledge of students can be informed by thoughtful use of assessment data. These data can include standards-based state level exams, but should not rely on these alone. Informal, teacher-made assessments as well as formative, curriculum-based assessments may be used in tandem with more formalized measures to create more well-developed understandings of students' abilities. It is easy for the sheer number of data points to become overwhelming, so it is important for school leaders to aid in the selection of assessments that will allow teachers to see students' comprehension of content as well as for teachers and students to see evidence of student growth. Sharing these data with students can help them to feel more invested in their progress and engaged in their learning. Students' engagement should also factor into teachers' knowledge of students, though it is less easily measured. Students bring more than a composite of skills into class and are best understood through multiple means. Teachers' observance of students' interests and outside of school literacies as they contribute to the identities that students bring to the classroom can also play a meaningful role in the design on classroom literacy practices.

Though numerous and varied, the conscious, knowledgeable integration of these influences might allow teachers to focus their priorities and energies when the demands of school schedules pull in many directions. This awareness will also help teachers to feel more anchored when educational tides shift, as they inevitably do. Grounding the

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execution of their professional knowledge in a flexible, substantiated knowledge about students as individuals and learners will further keep teachers present in the classroom.

Just as moving beyond a singular view of students will aid classroom work, the both/and perspective argued in chapter two has implications for researchers as well. Rich bodies of scholarship in literacy research and special education research have potential to inform one another if they are recognized as complementary. Studies of specialized instruction and interventions can be enriched by studies of context. Studies of how individuals' identities are enacted in different communities and contexts can be fortified by studies of effective instruction.

Researching students' school experiences from multiple perspectives will provide additional perspective on how students can and will read under different contexts and conditions (Lipson & Wixson, 1986). This work relies on multiple theoretical and conceptual frameworks and stands to benefit from investigation using multiple methodologies and mixed methods research. Complementary, integrated research frameworks are needed in response to Blanchett, Klingner, and Harry's (2009) call for "research that illuminates the complexity of intersections of race, culture, language, poverty, and disability using a strengths-based versus a deficit conceptual framework" (p.405). Looking into the intersections of the many factors that affect students and their reading practices has promise to inform teacher education programs, district and school-level planning, and individual students.

Finally, a third implication of this research is that when considering the many factors that affect students, it is the students themselves who are best positioned to know

in what ways and to what degrees these factors play a role in their reading difficulties.

Students can speak about what makes them feel confident or challenged. Students can

explain their strengths as well as their choices about participation in the classroom. Even

if students' assessments of their abilities do not match with teachers' assessments, this

creates openings for discussions where both teachers and students can share their

understandings. By bringing students' knowledge to the front of conversations about

how literacy is practiced in middle school classrooms, students voices to be treated as the

"primary sources of knowledge" that they are (Connor, 2008, p.67).

Proposed Additional Analyses

In this dissertation I included one student with an identified SLD in reading and

one considered to be a struggling reader, receiving general education interventions. My

analysis considered both students in the same ways, without regard to the distinctions of

their identifications. To better understand the nuances of these classifications, I plan to

compare these students more directly in future analyses. A cross-case analysis of these

two students would help me to understand what SLD and "struggling" mean for these two

individuals in this school context. Further, as these students presented themselves

similarly in some ways, I would be inclined to investigate two common contexts where

their differences were more apparent. For this reason, I would likely focus on these

students' participation in Math and Social studies because these were two classes they

both had with two teachers who offered unique perspectives on these students during

interview sessions. Examining how the two students were positioned by peers and the

teachers in each class played an interesting role in my observations and I would like to further explore this with systematic analysis.

Another way that I would like to analyze this data is by taking a closer look at the General Education Reading Intervention class. As I was able to spend more time than anticipated in this class, I gained additional insight into how instructional decisions were made by two specialists. Co-teaching the class for the first time, each teacher brought her own perspective about what was important to helping middle school students become more skilled, independent readers. This class was also interesting as a unique site within the structure of the school because it was one of the few academic general education classes not linked to a team. Commercially available interventions and assessments were driving factors and data were used in ways not observed elsewhere. I anticipate that further analyses focused on this context would provide insight about teachers' beliefs and the implementation of interventions.

Future Research

Working with these intervention specialists in particular caused me to reflect on the ways that teacher education programs have potential to influence teachers. Just as I have observed tensions between remediating foundational skills and teaching disciplinary content in middle school settings, I have also observed tensions between interventions and developing the habits of engaged readers. The knowledge of and values that teachers place on these different approaches will certainly shape the literacies practiced in their classrooms. Surveying middle school reading teachers, reading specialists, and other reading interventionists would provide information about the types of support programs

available to students in a given geographical area as well as provide insight about the influence of teachers' preparation. Collecting empirical data on this topic might complement, challenge, or otherwise further the theoretical work begun in this dissertation.

I am also interested in furthering this work by expanding on the theorizing that I did in chapter three situated middle school literacy practices by connecting this conceptual analysis with real-world experiences. As ethnography is meant for theory-building (Heath & Street, 2008), I wish to work with my initial analysis of the time I spent at Highland Middle School and work towards elevating my interpretations about how teachers made sense of historical and local influences into grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). My time at Highland Middle School marked an unexpected transition for the district to a heightened emphasis on using data and providing interventions. Given future opportunities to partner with middle schools in similar transitions, I would welcome the opportunity to engage in action research alongside teachers and teacher leaders as they make decisions in the design of a reading support program for students. Knowing that experts have cited logistical difficulty in implementing systems of intervention at the middle school level (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012), I anticipate my perspective on local practices might contribute to a contextualized view of what might work in one school. By continuing to connect practice and theory, I also anticipate gaining new understandings of teachers' beliefs about students who struggle, which will add richness and complexity to the theorizing I have begun.

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Appendix A Teacher Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As you know, I observed your lesson on (time/date). I am hoping that you will share with me some thoughts about how you prepared that lesson and how you felt it went.

1. Describe the reading and writing that students did during this lesson.

2. What did you do before or during the lesson to help students be successful with these practices?

3. What resources (if any) did you use while preparing this lesson? [Clarification if needed: Resources could include school or district curricula, textbooks, teacher guides, state standards, colleagues, etc.]

Were there specific individuals or groups of students that you accounted for in your planning? If so, who? What changes did you make based on these considerations?

4. Overall, how you see literacy used in (discipline)?

5. As you may be aware, I have been specifically working with Lauren & Mason. Can you tell me about how they participate in reading and writing tasks in your class?

Appendix B. Sample Data Table of Literacy Practices

Date	Hour	Event (Field Notes)	Text (Codes)/ How Text mediates (My Interpretation)	Teacher Comments (Interview Quotes & Notes)
3/16	3	T handed out a worksheet to be glued in, explained that she would be shifting back to the PPT so that students could complete the "Cornell Notes" on the sheet "What that means is filling in the missing words" PPT Slides (gradient green background) included: Term w/ a definition (purple) Examples (green) Image to the R of one example (silly, like a dog with a hot water bottle and thermometer) Simile- "As sick as a dog' What is being compared?... You probably need to do some inferencing" St(s?) asked What should we write? T: "You're going to write 'is like'" switched to the ELMO projector to show where words go. Showed slides for multiple terms [see Handout for guided/Cornell Notes] Pointed to the board where the Essential Question and Learning Target were and said "Remember: the purpose of this… to understand deeply" The pointed to and read aloud the EQ and LTs. As they progressed through more terms, sts would occasionally volunteer examples. One st was praised as doing what everyone should be doing "Think outside of the classroom… Where else are you hearing these things? Commercials, friends & family…" "Now we've come to the interactive part" SMART board Sort examples of simile and metaphor, Destiny Sticks, (drew 1, put it back) drew 6 more, then L L chose "cool" and had some trouble dragging it across the board. T used mouse to help her put it in the metaphor swirl. T: "What did you pick? And you think it is?... yup." Moving on… For hyperbole, T explained Something I use- a mnemonic device- for hyperbole- the hyper part means over doing it. St raised hand to volunteer T: Is this a question? NO? Let's keep it to questions.	SLIDES Ppt figurative language NOTES Guided/ Cornell IXN TCM Filling in blanks in notes --- T visually and verbally modeled filling in the blanks from a ppt where the terms were underlined. Also modeled the summary statement by giving text for sts to copy (no opportunity for sts to contribute). The version of CNotes locally situated in this classroom has T constructing the majority of the text and leaving single word blanks. She mentions this is to support EL students but appears to offer it to all.	**CORNELL/ GUIDED NOTES** "I do my mini lesson and then the mini lesson in was the use of the Cornell Notes so they had to just fill in scaffold it is notes so filling in words and using the PowerPoint, a Chrome PowerPoint to guide it through the mini lesson." "Our school is identified as an AVID school and so the Cornell notes are a note-taking strategy for the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders all use. The program also goes into the high school so it gets them ready for seventh and eighth grade and it helps to you know to do the thinking around those Cornell Notes thinking about 'what is the essential question?' 'what are their learning targets?' and we have that right there" "You know we just kind of opt to do, but knowing that it's best practice if the students have one set way of doing something or maybe a couple, there might be other ways of note taking but just at least having one that their familiar with." T views CNotes as a supportive stucture that sts can and will use with consistency. T believe this is best practice and that is why many teachers do it.

Appendix C. First Student Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I would like to ask some questions to get to know you better. All of the questions are about you and your opinions, so there are no right or wrong answers.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What kind of student are you?
3. What are some words that you might use to describe school?
4. Tell me about your favorite classes or teachers.
5. Compare your middle school experience (so far) with your elementary school experience.
6. What do you think about reading and writing in school? Outside of school?
7. How do you see yourself using reading and writing in your future?

Appendix D Second Student Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. You know that I have been observing your classes. I am hoping you will tell me about what the lessons were like for you.

First, please flip through your binder and show me some of the work that you have been doing (all subjects).

Now, please choose one thing you are proud of:

1. Describe the reading and writing that you did during this lesson.
2. How challenging did you find these activities?
3. If you needed help, what did you do?
4. What did your teacher do to help students (yourself or others)? What did your classmates do to help one another?
5. Was there anything else that would have made you feel more successful with this lesson?

Now, please choose one thing that you found challenging:

1. Describe the reading and writing that you did during this lesson.
2. How challenging did you find these activities?
3. If you needed help, what did you do?
4. What did your teacher do to help students (yourself or others)? What did your classmates do to help one another?
5. Was there anything else that would have made you feel more successful with this lesson?

   Compare the kinds of reading and writing you did in each of these assignments/classes.

Appendix E Third Student Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As you know, when I observed your classes I wrote some notes about what I saw. I would really like to know what that lesson was like for you.

1. First, I will share a short description of a classroom literacy event that I observed.
2. Then, I will check for accuracy:
   a. Tell me what you think about my description.
   b. What would you add or subtract to make it sound like how you remember that event?
3. Take a few moments to draw or create a representation of what you were thinking and feeling during this event. You can do this any way that you want. You might:
   a. Draw yourself in the scene, like a comic
   b. Draw speech or thought bubbles
   c. Use pictures, words, and colors to show how you felt or what you thought about this event.
4. Tell me about your picture. (Follow up questions about specific parts or colors used, etc.)

5. Now choose another classroom literacy event to describe. It could be a moment you found really interesting or engaging; it could be a moment you remember being challenging; or it could be something that you see as pretty typical, like it happens every day.
6. Just like before, I'm going to ask you to take a few moments to draw or create a representation of what you were thinking and feeling during this event. You can do this any way that you want. You might:
   a. Draw yourself in the scene, like a comic
   b. Draw speech or thought bubbles
   c. Use pictures, words, and colors to show how you felt or what you thought about this event.
7. Tell me about your picture. [This time I will write what the student describes/dictates]. (Follow up questions about specific parts or colors used, etc.)
8. I will reread what you described to me. Listen to tell me:
   a. If you think this description sounds right.
   b. If there is anything you add or subtract to make it sound like how you remember that event