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Understanding "Re-mediation" from a Student Perspective: Adolescents' Reading in High School Literacy Intervention Classes

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Understanding “Re-mediation” from a Student Perspective: Adolescents’ Reading in High School Literacy Intervention Classes

By

Katherine Knowles Frankel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Sarah W. Freedman, Co-Chair
Professor P. David Pearson, Co-Chair
Professor Silvia Bunge

Spring 2013
Understanding “Re-mediation” from a Student Perspective: Adolescents’ Reading in High School Literacy Intervention Classes

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Abstract

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Professors Sarah W. Freedman & P. David Pearson, Co-chairs

Most studies of so-called struggling readers and at-risk students talk about students but few account for students’ perspectives on their own learning as part of the research design. In this year-long qualitative study of two different ninth-grade literacy intervention classes in two secondary schools in California, I incorporated students’ perspectives into a larger study that examined how the two intervention models served students during their first year of high school. At the core of this study is the theoretical concept of re-mediation, a morphological derivation of mediation (Cole, 1996: Cole & Griffin, 1983), which provides an alternative to the deficit-oriented approach of remediation, a morphological derivation of remedy. This theoretical perspective allowed me to study intervention settings by focusing on activity systems and how they shape students’ learning rather than focusing on remediating individual student deficits. I argue that an advantage of examining interventions from students’ perspectives, as these perspectives emerged through the triangulation of multiple data sources, is that they provide a way to privilege students’ personal histories and identities at this critical juncture in their academic careers.

I combined interviews with focal students, teachers, parents, and administrators with surveys of a larger population of students, and incorporated classroom observations and samples of student work in order to gain the broadest possible understanding of the institutional and pedagogical conditions under which teachers and students operated in the two classrooms. More specifically, I sought to understand how those conditions, combined with students’ understandings of literacy and learning and their own academic identities, shaped and were shaped by the teaching and learning activities that occurred in the two classrooms. In my analysis, I paid particular attention to the teachers’ and students’ understandings of the objectives of the classes and how those perspectives shaped the reading and learning activities that occurred in them.

One of the central findings of this study is that the two literacy classes, Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop, re-mediated students’ reading in different ways. The objective of Enhanced Reading was to encourage students to read more in order to become better, more informed, readers, students, and people; the objective of Reading Workshop was to help students gain control over a series of strategies that they could use
to be more effective readers who would do better in school and on tests. These objectives led to different outcomes, with students in Enhanced Reading becoming more personally engaged with the act of reading high-interest texts and students in Reading Workshop becoming more strategic in how they approached texts similar to those they might encounter in school. Other findings from this study reveal how the larger institutional and pedagogical contexts in which the two classrooms operated had a profound impact on what re-mediation looked like in the two spaces. At the same time, the findings indicate that students themselves had an equally important impact on teaching and learning activities in their classrooms. Perhaps the most compelling finding is that the success of the two approaches to re-mediation varied for individual students in light of their personal histories and identities as readers and as students.

The findings from this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. At a theoretical level, they highlight the need to incorporate a theory of identity into future theorizations and applications of re-mediation in order to account for the ways in which re-mediation influences a subject’s relationship to his or her environment at the same time that it changes the nature of the activity. At empirical and practical levels, the findings demonstrate the value of attending to the larger contexts in which teaching and learning interactions occur and the multiple factors that mediate literacy and learning in classrooms. Finally, the findings from this study are a challenge to teachers and researchers alike to take seriously the longer-term outcomes of what we teach and study and to take into account the symbiotic relationship between activities and identities and how each informs and shapes the other. Looking across the two classrooms, it was evident that neither ambitious instruction nor authentic activity could accomplish separately what the two might accomplish together if treated as symbiotic rather than separate enterprises.
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Acknowledgements

I’ve often heard it said that writing a dissertation is like having a baby. I assume this comparison is usually meant to highlight the intense emotional work that goes into writing a dissertation. But, as someone who recently had a baby while in the process of writing her dissertation, for me the true similarity lies in the fact that they have led me to a much deeper appreciation for the many people in my life whose support made it possible to undertake both endeavors simultaneously. Therefore, I will begin by thanking the members of my family, each of whom supported me emotionally, intellectually, and practically over the past two years: my mom and dad, Linda and Alec Knowles; my brothers, Slater and Peter Knowles; my mother- and father-in-law, Candy and Arthur Frankel; my brother-in-law, Andrew Frankel; and, especially, my husband, Matt, and our wonderful, nineteen-month-old son, Abraham.

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CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It occurred to me that we had not been listening much to children in these recent years of ‘summit conferences’ on education, of severe reports and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, had been missing from the whole discussion. This seems especially unfortunate because the children often are more interesting and perceptive than the grown-ups are about the day-to-day realities of life in school. For this reason, I decided, early in my journey, to attempt to listen very carefully to children and, whenever possible, to let their voices and their judgments and their longings find a place within this book—and maybe, too, within the nation’s dialogue about their destinies.

--Kozol, 1992, pp. 5-6

It is with this observation that Kozol (1992) concludes the introduction to his bestselling and much-cited book, Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools. Although Kozol’s focus in this book is on the contrasts between rich and poor schools that arise from inequitable funding, I believe that his commitment to finding a place for students’ voices should be a central component of all facets of research in education. At the most fundamental level, then, this study is my effort to listen carefully to students—in this case, ninth-grade students—and to create a place for their voices and judgments in the ongoing national dialogue about how to best serve them.

Introduction

In the more than two decades since Kozol (1992) published Savage Inequalities, adolescent literacy has become a hot topic of discussion among educators, researchers, and policymakers. A common pretext for these discussions is the observation that many adolescents struggle in school because their literacy skills are not strong enough to handle the reading and writing that is required of them (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Kamil, 2003; Kamil et al., 2008; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; The National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2006; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). In Reading Next: A Vision of Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy, for example, Biancarosa and Snow (2004) assert that “experts in adolescent literacy estimate that as many as 70% of students struggle with reading in some manner” (pg. 8). And in 2002, the U. S. Department of Education [DOE] held a series of workshops to highlight areas of particular concern for adolescent literacy. As a follow up to these workshops, the DOE established a competitive grant called Striving Readers with the dual goal of “[raising] middle and high school students’ literacy levels in Title I-eligible schools with significant numbers of students reading below grade-levels” and “[building] a strong, scientific research base for identifying and replicating strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills” (U. S. DOE, 2012). Intentionally or not, these reports and programs position the student as an object of concern, a problem to be solved, not a source to be consulted. This phenomenon is particularly troublesome when so-called “at-risk” or “struggling” students are the focus because these students have been explicitly identified as objects of concern by their school systems.

One of the consequences of this objectification of students is that the field of education does not always take into account the wealth of knowledge and expertise that
students are capable of bringing to discussions about learning in school (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2002; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Cushman, 2003; Erickson & Shultz, 1992; Intrator & Kunzman, 2009; Oldfather et al., 1999; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Weinstein, 2002; Wilson & Corbett, 2007). Therefore, it is essential that future research in education acknowledge, encourage, and learn from the voices of so-called struggling readers themselves, particularly at this critical moment when conversations about how best to implement and assess the Common Core Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and Response to Intervention (RTI) initiatives (Dorn & Schubert, 2008; Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; Gelzheiser, Scanlon, & Hallgren-Flynn, 2010; Goetze, Laster, & Ehren, 2010; Johnston, 2011; Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009) are permeating the country’s educational agenda.

The purpose of this study is to understand how ninth-grade students placed in supplemental literacy classes view literacy and learning in school through the triangulation of multiple data sources, including interviews with students, teachers, parents, and administrators; classroom observations; samples of student work; and other data sources. In designing my study, I decided to work with ninth graders in the context of their literacy intervention classes for several reasons. The first reason is that literacy intervention classes, offered to students during the transition year between middle and high school, are uniquely positioned to reshape students’ educational trajectories. The transition from middle school to high school is a critical juncture in the lives of all students (Haney et al., 2004; Legters & Kerr, 2001; National High School Center, 2007; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenburg, 2001; Rubin, 2007). For students who are enrolled in ninth-grade literacy intervention classes, the ninth-grade transition year is even more critical because they are the students who have already been identified as at-risk for school failure.

The second reason is that ninth-grade literacy intervention classes have had some modestly positive results. The Enhanced Reading Opportunities Study (Corrin, Somers, Kemple, Nelson, & Sepanik, 2008; Somers et al., 2010) measured the effects of two year-long, ninth-grade reading intervention classes, Reading Apprenticeship’s Academic Literacy and the University of Kansas’ Xtreme Reading, on students’ reading skills and behaviors at the end of ninth grade and academic performance and behavioral outcomes in tenth grade. Both intervention models improved students’ reading comprehension, academic performance, and credit completion in ninth grade; however, these improvements were not large enough to make substantive differences for many students (Corrin et al., 2008). Moreover, the positive effects did not continue into the students’ tenth-grade year in any statistically significant way (Somers et al., 2010). Therefore, in this study I sought to explore qualitatively what specific benefits two different literacy interventions—Southern High’s Reading Workshop and Northern High’s Enhanced Reading1—might offer students during the ninth-grade transition year.

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1 Throughout this dissertation, all student, teacher, school, and district names are pseudonyms.
The third reason is that students are experts when it comes to their own academic experiences, and ninth-graders, in particular, have the potential to offer unique perspectives as veteran students in the novel academic setting of the high school. Two decades ago, Erickson & Shultz (1992) argued, “On the topic of student experience, students themselves are the ultimate insiders and experts” (p. 480). As insiders and experts, students have the potential to deepen our understanding of how to best serve them in the classroom and beyond. By focusing on the perspectives of students, as I understood them from the integration of multiple data sources, I sought to gain a more nuanced and contextualized view of the two literacy intervention contexts. At the same time, the student perspective allowed me to move away from deficit-oriented approaches to intervention research, where the student is an object of concern and a problem to be solved, not a source to be consulted.

In this chapter, I begin by introducing a theoretical framework that combines Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987) and its related theory of re-mediation (Cole & Griffin, 1983) with a socially, culturally, and historically situated theory of identity (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). I then use this theoretical framework as a lens through which to review three bodies of literature that address the topics of (a) the social construction of ability and disability, (b) adolescent literacy and the struggling reader, and (c) student perspectives on literacy and learning in school. I argue that these theories of re-mediation and identity, when combined with an emphasis on the perspectives of so-called struggling readers in the context of their literacy intervention classes, together provide an alternative framework through which to move beyond deficit-oriented approaches to research in these settings.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in a sociocultural orientation toward literacy and learning (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). This means that literacy “is always embedded in some social form…and it is always learnt in relation to these uses in specific social conditions” (Street, 1984, p. 43). A sociocultural perspective requires that literacy and its associate skills be studied in the context of the social practices through which they are learned and used. Therefore, in conceptualizing this study, I drew from two complementary sociocultural frames—Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987) and identity theory (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Ivanič, 1998; Wortham, 2006)—to formulate an understanding of the context of the intervention and the teaching-learning interactions of the students and teachers engaged in the intervention.

**Theorizing the Context: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory**

Cultural-historical activity theory builds from the basic premise that humans rely on both direct and indirect interactions with the environment in order to make sense of the world. Indirect interactions co-occur with direct interactions but, crucially, involve artifacts or tools that mediate an individual’s relationship to the environment (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2007). Though the concept of mediation applies to tools, generally speaking, cultural-historical activity theorists are particularly concerned with what Vygotsky (1978) calls “psychological tools,” such as language and other sign
systems, which mediate human action and play an integral role in learning and development (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1

Vygotsky’s (1978) Mediational Triangle

Engeström (1987) expands on Vygotsky’s (1978) original mediational triangle in order to emphasize the more complex and contextually situated nature of human activity (see Figure 1.2). Specifically, his contributions include rules, or “explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system”; community, or “those who share the same general object”; and division of labor, or “the division of object-oriented actions among members of the community” (Cole, 1996, p. 141). Crucially, Cole observes that in Engeström’s expanded mediational triangle, “contexts are activity systems. The subsystem [rules, community, division of labor] associated with the subject-mediator-object relationships exists as such only in relationship to the other elements of the system” (p. 141). This concept of mediation as it operates in activity systems is the basis for Cole and Griffin’s (1983) theory of re-mediation.

Re-mediation. “Re-mediation” is concerned with mediation in the context of cultural-historical activity systems (Cole, 1996). It is an alternative to traditional, deficit-based conceptions of “remediation,” which are derived from the word remedy and imply that there is a problem within the individual that requires treatment (Johnston & Allington, 1991). Re-mediation means to “mediate again” by offering alternative tools to support learning through joint activity between students and teachers (Cole, 1996; Cole & Griffin, 1983; Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). It therefore has the potential to shift the objective of reading in school by focusing on texts not as ends themselves, but as mediating tools that facilitate comprehension in its broadest sense. When researchers and educators view schools, in general, and traditionally remedial (i.e., intervention) classes, in particular, this way, students can be

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2 The term re-mediation has been used by other scholars (e.g., Alvermann, 2005; Alvermann & Rush, 2004; Luke & Elkins, 2000), as a way to discuss the intersection of literacy education and twenty-first-century literacies. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I employ the term re-mediation as Cole and Griffin (1983) and Gutiérrez and her colleagues (2009) define it.
positioned to offer their perspectives as subjects, not objects, of conversations about literacy and learning.

Figure 1.2
Engeström’s (1987) Model of an Activity System

Re-mediation in reading instruction. The crux of Cole and Griffin’s (1983) argument about re-mediation is articulated through their example of reading instruction. They argue that the prevalence of traditional approaches to remediation means that students who appear to struggle with reading do not see reading as a means through which to interpret the world. Rather, these readers see reading as restricted to them, the teacher, and the text. It is possible, for example, to answer questions correctly in this scenario without actually comprehending the text. Re-mediation, however, shifts the objective of the activity to one of greater significance by focusing on the activity of comprehension as the ultimate goal of reading and the process of joint activity between teacher and students as the means through which meaning making occurs.

Greenleaf and her colleagues (2001) provide one example of what re-mediation might look like in a ninth-grade classroom. As part of a mixed-methods study, they looked at student case studies, surveys, and test scores to illuminate the ways in which struggling readers learned to be more strategic, confident, and knowledgeable in their interactions with texts in the context of one of Reading Apprenticeship’s ninth-grade Academic Literacy courses. The authors present the Academic Literacy course as an alternative to traditional (remedial) literacy instruction and locate it in “a socially and cognitively complex conception of literacy” (p. 82). They explain that the class seeks to
nurture students’ relationships with texts in positive and productive ways by creating an environment in which students want to read (e.g., by encouraging students to read books they enjoy and providing time for independent reading in the classroom) while also helping students to become strategic readers.

Greenleaf and her colleagues (2001) highlight the experiences of one focal student, Rosa, as representative of the ways that Reading Apprenticeship can foster a non-traditional approach to reading instruction. In one of her interviews, Rosa reflected on the ways that her attitude toward history changed as a result of the Academic Literacy course. In her previous history class the year before, Rosa explained, she approached history through the textbook’s “red squares” and “unit” questions that required very little understanding to complete. She observed that, often, answering these types of questions required little more effort than finding and copying sentences directly from the textbook into her notebook. In the Academic Literacy course, however, Rosa found it necessary to read and reflect on the assigned material in order to have enough of an understanding to be able to complete assignments and participate productively in class. From this and other interviews with students, the authors found that, as a result of the Academic Literacy course, students learned to approach texts in a more reflective fashion and, in so doing, gain a deeper understanding of the material. The results of their study led Greenleaf and her colleagues to emphasize the need for interventions that address issues such as “how we read and why we read in the ways we do,” in addition to “what we read in subject-matter classes” (p. 89). Although it is not clear to what extent Rosa’s experience in the Academic Literacy course is representative of the experiences of other students, the authors capture a qualitative shift in her perspective on reading that suggests that, through her work in the course, Rosa had expanded her understanding of the importance of reading in a way that is consistent with Cole and Griffin’s (1983) theory of re-mediation.

Looking at Rosa’s experience from a cultural-historical activity theory framework, the objective of reading in school for Rosa in this classroom is not assignment completion but the ability to comprehend texts both in and out of school. In this scenario, reading becomes more than the ability to read out loud, answer questions, or pass tests. Rather, the ideal outcome of such an approach to literacy instruction is that students come to see themselves as readers and to see reading as a valuable part of their lives in school and beyond.

Theorizing the Student: Literacy and Identity

Also informing this study is a theory of identity that emphasizes its contextualized and multifaceted nature. Particularly relevant is Holland and her colleagues’ (1998) characterization of identities as social products that “are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice” (p. 5). Drawing from Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981), they propose the concept of “figured worlds” as a way to situate identity within specific social, cultural, and historical processes. In this theory of “identity in practice,” “identities and the acts attributed to them are always forming and re-forming [on intimate as well as social landscapes] in relation to historically specific contexts” (p. 284). This emphasis on identities as they are formed and reformed in practice and over time is crucial because it helps to illuminate the ways in which contexts—here, academic contexts—give rise to certain ways of viewing
oneself and one’s abilities (Wortham, 2006). Yet the relationship between context and identity is not a one-way proposition. Rather, “literacy practices…are both shaped by and shapers of people’s identity: acquiring certain literacy practices involves becoming a certain type of person” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 67). This means that what students believe to be the objectives of the literacy practices in which they are engaged provides insight into the types of people that students see themselves as being in the present and becoming in the future. Moreover, how students view themselves in relation to their literacy practices is a way to better understand those literacy practices, too.

Hall’s (2005, 2010) study of three female struggling middle school readers and their teachers reveals how students’ interactions with literacy tasks are influenced by their identities as readers or non-readers and their objectives (e.g., to save face in front of peers, to appear smart for parents, to avoid being labeled as a poor reader). At the same time, Hall demonstrates how the students’ teachers interacted with the girls in ways that aligned with their own understandings of what it means to be a good reader and whether or not the identities that they associated with these particular students fit those reading models. Hall (2005) explains that “[this study] allows for greater understanding of how students’ beliefs about themselves as readers has the potential to affect the ways in which they learn content and/or how they improve as readers of content area text. It also suggests that teachers may need help in thinking about their interactions with struggling readers beyond strategy instruction and how they can develop an understanding of students’ literate identities” (pp. 3–4). Hall’s study is pivotal because it highlights the importance of a student’s various strategies and motivations for managing her roles as reader versus non-reader in specific academic contexts. It calls attention to the kinds of problematic assumptions that stem from teachers’ inaccurate understandings of students’ motivations and purposes for adopting certain orientations toward reading in school. From an activity theory perspective, the primary objective of all three girls in Hall’s study was to construct and uphold certain images of themselves. This is not to say that the girls’ objectives are illegitimate; to the contrary, they are critically important and point to the need to consider the learner’s perspective as a first step in creating contexts of re-mediation.

The Social Construction of Ability and Disability

The theories of re-mediation and identity introduced in the previous section provide lenses through which to complicate notions of success and failure in academic settings. The research literature on learning disabilities also addresses this concern (e.g., Lipson & Wixson, 1986; McDermott, 1993; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Mehan, 1993) and should be considered in discussions about any student who is identified for his or her nonconformance to literacy norms, whatever the reason. It is this identification and labeling process that contributes to the objectification of students in school. According to Johnston and Allington (1996), “Remediation encompasses efforts to instruct any child whose reading development has, by some arbitrary standard, been deemed less than satisfactory, regardless of the supposed etiology or the source of funding for the instruction provided” (p. 988). McDermott (1993) provides a concrete example of the social construction of ability and
disability through a case study of a student named Adam. While McDermott and his colleagues initially set out to investigate the specific traits that rendered Adam disabled, they explain that their approach changed over time: “After following Adam for 18 months, we gave up on specifying his traits as the explanation of his behavior and began talking instead about what happened around him daily that seemed to organize his moments as an LD person” (p. 273). This case study demonstrates the importance of context to the construction of disability. In some contexts (e.g., everyday life), Adam’s disability is hardly noticeable; in other contexts (e.g., classroom lessons), his disability is highly visible. Because “neither Adam, nor his disability, can be separated from the contexts in which they emerge” (p. 291), it is not productive to talk about his difficulties in terms of deficit models because his disability or lack of disability is highly context dependent—he, like anyone, is “disabled” in some contexts and enabled in others.

Some scholars have addressed this problem of the social construction of ability and disability by calling attention to the conditions under which different readers operate—sometimes struggling and sometimes not. Lipson and Wixson (1986), for example, propose an “interactionist perspective of reading disability.” The interactionist view “suggests that reading (dis)ability is a relative concept, not a static state” (p. 115) and predicts performance variability across different texts, tasks, and settings. The central question is not one of ability or disability but of how a reader performs under varying conditions and, relatedly, which of those conditions are most conducive to learning for that particular reader.

While Lipson and Wixson (1986) focus on how individuals perform in different contexts, Weinstein (2002) and Dweck (1999) question the notion of “disability” itself and what it implies about notions of success and failure in school and beyond. In her investigations of student-teacher expectations in school, Weinstein writes:

One can ask whether those who slide through school without effort, without failure, and perhaps, without passion are also the disabled ones. Should we not ultimately expect all to struggle, to learn from failure, and to persist in overcoming obstacles to solving challenging problems? … When uneven performance and the use of help are stigmatized in schools, we create a world in which striving for mastery on complex tasks is rarely attempted unless success is assured. (p. 37)

Dweck echoes this sentiment in her research on students’ beliefs about themselves—what she calls “self-theories”—and their consequences:

It has become common practice in much of our society to praise students for their performance on easy tasks, to tell them they are smart when they do something quickly and perfectly. When we do this we are not teaching them to welcome challenge and learn from errors. We are teaching them that easy success means they are intelligent and, by implication, that errors and effort mean they are not. (p. 43)

Weinstein and Dweck, therefore, are concerned with how contexts of learning structure students’ understandings of what it means to succeed and fail in school.

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3 Adam’s story is one case in a larger study by Cole, Hood, and McDermott (1978).
Lipson and Wixon’s (1986) “interactionist perspective” and Weinstein’s (2002) and Dweck’s (1999) concerns about the construction of success and failure in school are evidence that empirical and theoretical perspectives focusing on conditions rather than individuals exist; however, Johnston and Allington (1996) question the effectiveness with which these theories are translated into practice. Specifically, they observe that many literacy interventions do not abide by best practices in education. Instead, echoing Cole and Griffin (1983) they explain that “remediation” in its typical form is an occasion for less instruction and reading time and more worksheet completion and skill-and-drill time (see Rose, 2012, for a similar argument about remediation, particularly remedial writing classes in community colleges). This emphasis on isolated skills means that students are reading less when what they really need to do is spend more time reading actual texts. Johnston and Allington note that students often have a negative view of reading and writing and suggest that our current, inadequate approaches to instruction might be an important factor that contributes to these negative views and constructions of ability and disability in the classroom. Notions of success, failure, and ability are socially constructed, they argue, and it is instruction—not the student—that should be remediated.

**Adolescent Literacy and the “Struggling” Reader**

Although the theory of re-mediation introduced above is a way to conceive of literacy and learning in terms of reframing the context of instruction (and the students’ agentive role in that context) as opposed to changing or “fixing” the student, there are clear tensions in the field of adolescent literacy around these two ways of framing the “problem” of adolescent literacy. These tensions are particularly salient when the discussion turns to students who are perceived to struggle with literacy in school.

The topic of adolescent literacy has garnered a great deal of attention in recent years. In 1999, the International Reading Association’s Commission on Adolescent Literacy published a position statement (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999) in which the authors note a troubling inattention to the subject of adolescent literacy and outline seven principles that adolescents “deserve,” including:

1. Access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read;  
2. Instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials;  
3. Assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them grow as readers;  
4. Expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum;  
5. Reading specialists who assist individual students having difficulty learning how to read;  
6. Teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics; and  
7. Homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed.

Implied in this position statement and accompanying list of principles is the belief that what adolescents deserve in literacy instruction is not what they are getting. Indeed, a myriad of reports and other publications outlining the troubling state and future directions
of adolescent literacy research and practice soon followed (e.g., Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Kamil, 2003; Kamil et al., 2008; Lee & Spratley, 2010; NCTE, 2006; Rycik & Irvin, 2001; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). The research that has emerged since this initial position statement continues to reflect the underlying tensions between re-mediating the context, on one hand, and remediating the student, on the other.

Re-mediating the Context: Adolescents’ Out-of-School and Content-Area Literacies

What recent research on adolescents’ out-of-school and content-area literacies have in common is their recognition that literacies are multiple, situated, and greatly influenced by adolescents’ identities in specific contexts. Concerned with the need to take into account the rich literacy practices that occur in out-of-school settings (Hull & Schultz, 2001), researchers working with adolescents in out-of-school contexts seek to understand the various ways that adolescents engage in non-schooled literacy practices and, in some cases, what implications these practices have for schooled literacies (Alvermann, 2009; Lee, 2001; Moje, 2002; Moje et al., 2004; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008).

Moje and her colleagues (2008), for example, spent several years investigating the literacy practices of hundreds of adolescents in a primarily Latino/a community in the Midwest and looked at the relationship between these out-of-school literacy practices and the students’ in-school achievement. They found that the majority (92%) of the adolescents in their study report reading outside of school but that these situated and purpose-driven reading practices did not necessarily translate to in-school contexts. In more recent analyses of the data from this project, Moje and her research team looked at correlations between students’ academic and reading achievement and attitudes. They found that high-achieving students were more likely than low-achieving students to value reading in and out of school, see themselves as good readers, and read texts that introduce ideas and concepts that are removed from their lives (Stockdill et al., 2011). Studies like this one challenge deficit-oriented perspectives on literacy by illuminating the many ways in which adolescents engage with texts, though not necessarily in an academic context.

Researchers concerned with content-area literacies look at literacy practices in the context of different academic subject areas. They emphasize the importance of attending to the reading that occurs in specific disciplines—what Jetton and Alexander (2004) call “domain literacies”—as unique practices that require specialized and discipline-specific reading strategies (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Lee & Spratley, 2010; Litman & Greenleaf, 2008; Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Schoenbach and Greenleaf (2009), for example, demonstrate ways that secondary teachers in different disciplines (e.g., chemistry, United States history) fostered “engaged academic literacy” as part of their subject-area curriculum. Research of this nature challenges autonomous and monolithic models of literacy by demonstrating how reading varies from discipline to discipline and advocating for the importance of contextualized literacy instruction across subject areas. In the research literature on adolescents’ out-of-school and content-area literacies, context plays an important role in understanding literacy and learning in and out of school.
Remediating the Student: Literacy Interventions for Adolescents

In contrast to the literature on adolescent literacy, research on interventions for adolescents who are perceived to struggle with literacy tends to focus on individual student deficits rather than on the context of instruction. Though there seems to be a consensus that literacy interventions are important and necessary, there is some disagreement about how best to enact them (Frankel, Pearson, & Nair, 2011), with some approaches emphasizing instruction in specific skills such as phonemic awareness (e.g., Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program for Reading, Spelling, and Speech), others emphasizing reading comprehension strategies (e.g., Reading Apprenticeship, Reciprocal Teaching), and still others attempting to focus on a more individualized, or tiered, approach to instruction (e.g., the Strategic Instruction Model). Whether the focus is on skills or strategies, however, the underlying assumption in many literacy interventions is that a student lacks certain characteristics that are necessary to be a good reader. Remediation, therefore, targets these deficits.

Re-mediation in Intervention Settings

By characterizing literacy interventions as remedial, I do not mean to suggest that interventions that focus on improving students’ reading skills or providing them with reading strategies are inherently deficit-oriented. My point, rather, is that it is quite easy in intervention settings to view students through a remedial, deficit-oriented lens. Viewing students in this way can render the context of instruction invisible to scrutiny and position students as passive recipients rather than active agents of learning. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, and these exceptions provide insights into how the context of an intervention might shape instruction in ways that give students agency. Greenleaf and her colleagues’ (2001) study of Reading Apprenticeship discussed previously is an example of an approach to literacy instruction that focuses on strategy instruction but, at the same time, takes into account the importance of the context of instruction. Another example is Lee’s (2001) Cultural Modeling Project that seeks to capitalize on the continuities between students’ in-school and out-of-school experiences. Lee describes her approach as

An attempt to provide support for the empowerment of the English departments in urban high schools through curriculum development, technology infusion, professional development, and assessment. It is based on the premise that students bring to the language arts classroom a rich array of knowledge that is useful for learning generative concepts and strategies in reading and writing. (p. 100)

Lee draws from the language characteristics of African American English, and particularly signifying, as a bridge to encourage students to think about the use of language in academic literary contexts. Thus, by using prior knowledge to make a connection between home and school cultures, teachers and students are able to develop a common language through which to access increasingly unfamiliar texts in the classroom.

For the purposes of the present study, I argue that a combination of theories of remediation and identity with an emphasis on student perspectives has the potential to

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4 See Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, and Nair (2007) for a compilation of instructional programs for struggling adolescent readers.
reconcile the approach generally taken by adolescent literacy research, with its emphasis on students’ multiple literacies in and out of school, on one hand, and literacy intervention research, with its tendency to focus on a more restricted notion of literacy, on the other. In undertaking this project, however, I remain aware that simply incorporating students’ voices does not, in and of itself, ensure an activity-focused approach to research in intervention settings, nor does it necessarily mean that these interventions will serve students better. Rather, what the student perspective affords is an explicit shift in the focus of the research from a lens that looks for deficits in students to one that looks at instructional contexts—as represented by students in interviews but also in and through the daily literacy practices in which they engage—and how they serve students.

**Student Perspectives on Literacy and Learning**

Studies that prioritize the student perspective range from elementary school (Evans, 2002; Weinstein, 2002) to postsecondary education (Duggan & Williams, 2010; Gruber, Reppel, & Voss, 2010; Light, 2001; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2010) and focus on a range of school-related topics. Studies that focus on adolescents’ perspectives, in particular, range from the classroom specific (Alvermann et al., 1996, on discussions about content-area texts; Baker, 2010, on constructions of reading in the classroom and beyond; Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003, and Intrator, 2003, on what brings meaning to a classroom experience; and Rogers, 1991, on the process of literary interpretation) to school-wide concerns such as school improvement and reform (Cook-Sather, 2002; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Flutter, 2006; Mitra, 2004; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996; Wilson & Corbett, 2001), what makes an effective teacher (Chan, 2011; Cushman, 2003; Damico, Fradd, Roth, & Hankins, 1990; Intrator & Kunzman, 2009; Nieto, 1994; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Turley, 1994; Wilson & Corbett, 2001), pressures and problems that impact school life (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994; Pope, 2001; Shakespear, 1999), dropping out (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988), and giving voice to students as researchers (Cook-Sather, 2006; Garcia, Kilgore, Rodriguez, & Thomas, 1995; Oldfather et al., 1999; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Weis & Fine, 1993).

Of particular relevance to this study is work that is attentive to the social construction of ability and disability in school, on one hand, and that seeks to understand how students perceive the purposes and goals of their academic experiences, on the other. Oftentimes, these two topics go hand in hand. Weinstein’s (2002) decades-long work with elementary school students demonstrates the capacity for even very young children to articulate and analyze their understandings of what happens between students and teachers in classrooms. Specifically, she has found that elementary school children, even young ones, know that teachers, on average, treat high and low achievers differently within the same classroom. High expectations, trust, and opportunity from teachers are linked with doing well in school, whereas scolding, monitoring, and lots of help are associated with poor performance. (p. 110)

In one study involving 133 fourth grade children from sixteen inner-city classrooms, Weinstein discusses how she and her colleagues asked children to identify what events
told them about good versus bad performance in the classroom. She explains, “Children were more likely to refer to teacher praise and rewards or to teacher criticism and punishments, rather than to marks and to test results.” When asked this question, 40% of the fourth graders indicated that “the assignment of remedial work” and “the amount of help given” (p. 98) were indicative of poor performance in the classroom.

In addition to student-teacher interactions, Weinstein (2002) explains that certain organizational elements of the classroom, what she calls the “microsystems of classroom life” (p. 103), provide children with insights into their own and others’ abilities. These elements include: (a) the ways in which students are grouped for instruction, (b) the materials and activities through which the curriculum is taught, (c) the evaluation system that teachers use to assess student learning, (d) the motivational system that teachers use to engage student learning, (e) the responsibility that students have in directing and evaluating their learning, and (f) the climate of relationships within the class, with parents, and with the school. In light of her research findings over time, Weinstein argues, “That children’s interpretations of teacher behavior reflect subtle, cross-channel and cross-student observations highlight that it is the perspective of the student, the one who is most strongly affected by teacher expectations, that needs to be most vigorously studied” (p. 112). Weinstein’s research findings indicate that children’s understandings of ability in the classroom are highly nuanced and complex, and future research must give voice to these understandings and their consequences.

While studies that attend to the social construction of ability and disability in school incorporate the perspectives of both academically successful and unsuccessful students, studies that seek to understand how students perceive the objectives and outcomes of their academic experiences often privilege the perspectives of students who are academically successful. Pope’s (2001) qualitative investigation of five academically successful tenth and eleventh graders who are adept at “doing school” (p. 4) is an example of a study with this focus. Pope found that “doing school” for these students entailed establishing allies and treaties, multi-tasking, cheating, and being “squeaky wheels” (p. 152). It also meant becoming victims of the “grade trap” in which “[the students felt] bound by a narrow definition of success” (p. 5) and “an A grade…did not necessarily mean that the students learned and retained content area knowledge and skills or that they understood important concepts or theories” (p. 156). Success for the five students in Pope’s study meant doing what was necessarily to obtain a high grade, whether that grade reflected true understanding of the academic content or not. Like Hall’s (2010) study of three struggling readers in content area classrooms, Pope’s study reveals that the objectives of schooling from the perspective of students are not always what educators and researchers assume them to be. Furthermore, Pope’s study addresses constructions of what it means to be academically successful or unsuccessful and the consequences of these constructions for students.

Nieto’s (1994) investigation of a diverse group of eleventh and twelfth graders is another example of a study that focuses on the perspectives of academically successful students. Nieto draws upon data from ten student case studies to gain insight into what students think about school in terms of the curriculum; pedagogy; tracking, ability grouping, grades, and expectations of student achievement; and racism and discrimination. One of her conclusions is that the ten students in her study
are not looking for one magic solution or method. In fact, they have many, sometimes contradictory, suggestions to make about pedagogy. While rarely speaking with one voice, they nevertheless have similar overriding concerns: too many classrooms are boring, alienating, and disempowering. (p. 409)

Nieto also discusses the implications of her study methodology for the students themselves. She observes that “for the ten young people in [her] study, the very act of speaking about their schooling experiences seemed to act as a catalyst for more critical thinking about them” (p. 420). Cook-Sather (2002) echoes this sentiment when she contends that research that takes into account the student perspective has positive effects for the students as well as for the field of study:

When students have the opportunity to articulate their perspectives on school, they not only offer insights into that schooling that are valuable for educators. They also have an opportunity to hone their own thinking—to think metacognitively and critically about their educational experiences. (p. 10)

Nieto’s (1994) study, therefore, provides insights into students’ perspectives on a range of topics related to school but also demonstrates how such insights open up possibilities for critical thinking.

Finally, Mitra’s (2004) study of the emergence of student voice through two student groups in a high school in Northern California further highlights the potential for students to benefit from opportunities to speak their minds while also proposing a way to make school more meaningful to students. In this case, Mitra actively sought out the perspectives of students who were not engaged with school. She analyzed the “student voice activities” (p. 652) of twenty-four students in the context of one of two student groups at the school. Mitra found that the opportunity to engage in student voice activities enhanced the youths’ developmental growth, especially in terms of the key assets of agency (i.e., articulating options to others, viewing oneself as a change-maker, developing a sense of leadership), belonging (i.e., developing relationships with adults, improving interactions with teachers, increasing attachment to school), and competence (i.e., critiquing one’s environment, developing problem-solving skills, getting along with others, speaking publicly). Significantly, Mitra noted that the student voice activities offered through the two students groups led to experiences that were particularly important for students who did not see school as meaningful. In addition, she pointed to the importance of teacher-student relationships that challenge the traditional roles of teacher and student by focusing on “youth and adults working together on shared activities” (p. 654). Mitra’s study, therefore, builds on Pope’s (2001) and Nieto’s (1994) findings to suggest that incorporating opportunities for students to have a voice and take action in a school context has a positive influence on students’ development and makes school more meaningful. Although studies like the ones above focus on the student perspective in various academic contexts, what is notably missing from this body of literature is research that elicits students’ perspectives in the context of intervention settings, generally, and literacy intervention classrooms, particularly.

In this study, therefore, I take into account issues of student identity in the specific context of ninth-grade literacy intervention classes in order to understand how they are informed by students’ perspectives on literacy and learning as well as how they shape
those perspectives. In considering the student perspective, however, I do not limit my investigation to student interview data. Rather, I consider the perspectives of students as they emerge from the triangulation of multiple data sources in order to understand these perspectives in context and over time.

**Research Needs**

Though educational researchers have begun to address the importance of listening to students’ voices, most often the voices that are heard are the voices of students who are academically successful in school. Moreover, scholars interested in student perspectives continue to emphasize the need for more research in this area. Of particular interest to some of these scholars is research that looks closely at the purposes of schooling and the strategies that help students to achieve these objectives. Yazzie-Mintz (2010), the former director of the *High School Survey of Student Engagement*, for example, addresses the role that the student perspective must play in future approaches to learning, in which the purpose of school is about more than obtaining a high school diploma or landing a job:

> In attempting to navigate the teacher/learner relationship within high schools, the most important question to ask and answer is: What is the purpose of schooling in high schools in the United States? If the purpose is to get students a high school diploma, then passing classes, acquiring credits, and successfully completing standardized assessments will be more important than the quality of the student experience. If the purpose is to prepare students to get a job in the workforce, then expanding opportunities within school, creating experiences relevant for the world of work, and enlarging the scope of schooling beyond academics will be critical. If the purpose is to create a way of learning and acquiring knowledge, to dig into an area of interest and inquiry, and to take an intellectual or practical passion to the next level of schooling and/or work, then engaging students in the life and work of schools will be of paramount importance. (p. 24)

Here, Yazzie-Mintz provocatively suggests that engaging students in conversations about their experiences in school is not only prudent but a necessary precondition to fostering an academic environment that encourages students to become lifelong learners.

Student perspectives on the tools that assist them in the classroom are just as important as their perspectives on the objectives of schooling because re-mediation involve shifts in tool use in order for learning to occur. In other words, it is not possible to investigate students’ understandings of the objectives of schooling without also taking into consideration the tools that they see as mediating those objectives. Intrator and Kunzman (2009) address this concern in their observation that “what is particularly missing from [adolescent literacy research] is student perspective on teaching strategies”:

> Adolescents are accustomed to making choices or adopting a consumerist orientation toward experiences. In light of this tendency, it is important to understand youth perspective and reaction to a range of teaching strategies and approaches.

> Even when student voice is solicited for research or school improvement initiatives, the rarest form of study involves exploration of a student’s immediate experience. (p. 32)
In this dissertation study, therefore, I address the need for more research that seeks to understand students’ perspectives on the objectives of schooling as well as the tools that students believe help or hinder their ability to achieve these objectives. Moreover, by focusing specifically on students who have been identified as struggling readers and, consequently, enrolled in literacy intervention classes during their first year of high school, I look at the ways that the students’ academic identities influence and are influenced by these beliefs.

The Present Study

The theory of re-mediation that frames this study provides a language through which to conceive of literacy intervention settings as comprised of socially situated practices that shape and are shaped by the students who participate in them. However, while this theory serves as a reminder about what the objectives of literacy practices in school should be, it does not fully theorize students’ identities as readers and students and how these identities interact with students’ understandings of the objectives and outcomes of their experiences in school. Therefore, in this study I also seek to reach a deeper theorization of the student as the subject of the activity system by investigating students’ perspectives on the objectives of literacy and learning in their intervention classes, the tools that mediate these objectives, and the outcomes of their participation in intervention classes as they relate to academic achievement and identity formation and reformation. It is this challenge that I take on through the following three research questions:

• What are the institutional and pedagogical conditions under which Mr. Taylor and his students operated in Enhanced Reading and Ms. Cheung and her students operated in Reading Workshop? How do these conditions shape re-mediation in the two classes? (Chapter 3)

• How do students’ understandings of literacy and learning and their own academic identities interact with the understandings of their teachers in the context of the two literacy intervention classes? (Chapter 4)

• How do students’ understandings of the literacy and learning objectives and outcomes of their literacy classes interact with their emerging identities as readers and students? (Chapter 5)
CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

The vast majority of the research literature on students, in general, and struggling readers, in particular, addresses issues of student achievements and struggles, but few studies account for students’ perspectives as part of the research design. The lack of attention to students’ perspectives is particularly true for studies that focus on intervention settings. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to learn more about students’ perspectives on literacy interventions by investigating the perspectives of students in two different ninth grade literacy intervention classes at two school sites during the 2010-2011 school year.

Student Perspectives

Though student interviews are at the heart of my study, I found that understanding the perspectives of students involves much more than simply asking them questions about school. It also requires close attention to the experiences that students bring to the classroom, as well as their lived experiences in the different contexts in and through which they learn. Therefore, I use the term “student perspectives” with a very specific meaning in mind. It is inspired by Thiessen’s (2007) definition of the term:

In contrast to attitudes and perceptions, student perspectives are constructed, individually varied, situated or contextually bounded, and negotiated in the socio-political realities of classroom and school life. Researchers who study student perspectives develop more complicated and changing portrayals of how students make sense of their lives at school; they explore how students come to know and cope with social and academic demands; and they inquire into students’ views on those educational policies and practices that shape their time at school. As authors of their own life stories, students provide important insights into the classrooms and schools they experience. (p. 54)

I employed a qualitative research design (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Shram, 2006) because it allowed me to study student perspectives in the contextualized and nuanced way described by Thiessen. Specifically, I combined student interviews with other tools of qualitative inquiry including participant observation, surveys, artifact analysis, and interviews with key participants in students’ academic lives.

A central affordance of considering student perspectives is that it has the potential to challenge deficit-oriented approaches to literacy research. Because I am interested in intervention contexts specifically, student perspectives were critical to my study for two reasons. One, they helped me to determine activities that are (or are not) “meaningful and recognizable” (Heath & Street, 2008) to the students enrolled in the classes. Both of the intervention classes in my study presumed to help students with reading in specific ways; attending to student perspectives allowed me to determine whether and in what ways these classes achieved their goals. Two, they allowed me to conduct my research through an en-abling rather than dis-abling approach. By positioning myself as an inquisitive outsider in my interactions with students, I sought to position them as authorities on their experiences with literacy and learning in school.
Study Methodology

Following the theories of re-mediation and identity outlined in the previous chapter, I identified two case study classes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), Enhanced Reading at Northern High and Reading Workshop at Southern High, that consisted of approximately fourteen students each (exact numbers varied as students switched in and out of the classes over the course of the year). Within those two classes, I identified eight focal students—four students in Enhanced Reading and four students in Reading Workshop—in order to investigate how they understood the purposes (objectives) of their ninth-grade literacy classes and other academic classes and the supports (tools) that were available to them in the context of these classrooms as well as how these understandings played out in teaching-learning interactions and the outcomes of these interactions across subject areas. I employed ethnographic data collection methods (Heath & Street, 2008) in order to answer the following research questions:

- What are the institutional and pedagogical conditions under which Mr. Taylor and his students operated in Enhanced Reading and Ms. Cheung and her students operated in Reading Workshop? How do these conditions shape re-mediation in the two classes?
- How do students’ understandings of literacy and learning and their own academic identities interact with the understandings of their teachers in the context of the two literacy intervention classes?
- How do students’ understandings of the literacy and learning objectives and outcomes of their literacy classes interact with their emerging identities as readers and students?

I employed a multiple, embedded case study approach because nested cases provided me with two interconnecting levels of investigation and analysis. At one level, I sought to better understand literacy intervention classes as they operate in the context of different school sites. I identified two research sites through “reputational case selection” in which “key informants” (Goetz & LeCompte, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28) identified veteran literacy teachers working with ninth-grade students reading at least two years below grade level in the context of literacy intervention classes. One key informant was an experienced teacher and graduate student who put me in touch with a former colleague who taught a ninth-grade literacy intervention class. The second key informant was a university professor in charge of an English Master’s program. She introduced me to one of her former students who taught a ninth-grade literacy intervention class. After speaking with both teachers, I decided to employ a multiple case study design because the two literacy intervention classes differed in important ways, and I reasoned that these differences would provide me with points of comparison and contrast at this first level of analysis.

At another level, I sought to understand how individual students understood the objectives of their literacy intervention classes and how these understandings played out in teaching-learning interactions across subject-area classes. In September 2010, I invited

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5 The term “veteran literacy teacher” refers to teachers who have been teaching ninth-grade literacy classes for five or more years.
students in each of the literacy intervention classes to participate in my study. From the fifteen students who expressed interest in participating in the study, I selected eight students (four from each classroom) as focal students. I chose focal students with an eye toward obtaining as diverse a cross-section of students as possible. Therefore, I considered factors such as gender, English Language status, and disability status in my selections, as well as students’ reading histories and current orientations toward reading.

In sum, a multiple, embedded case study approach allowed me to look closely at student cases within and across different literacy intervention contexts. It also allowed me to foreground student perspectives but only as I came to understand them within specific contexts. Dyson and Genishi (2005) discuss the power of the case as a way to illuminate participants’ understandings of literacy and their enactments of literacy and learning in specific contexts:

In a case study, any descriptor that might be attached to a child (e.g., literate, struggling, proficient, ELL, or ESL) becomes a socially accomplished construct enacted in particular physical settings, in certain kinds of events or practices, and with particular materials and is infused with certain ideologies or assumptions about how the world works… there is no assumption that teaching methods per se are causal; indeed, particular teaching approaches that work in one setting may not work in another, and those that work with one child may not work with another… What are causal are human interpretations, on the basis of which people act. Both teachers and students bring interpretive frames that influence their ways of attending and responding to others within the social activities of the classroom. The research uses particular methods of observation and analysis to understand others’ understandings (their sense of what’s happening and, therefore, what’s relevant) and the processes through which they enact language and literacy education. (pp. 11-12)

I chose to investigate the perspectives of eight students in two different literacy intervention contexts because the design allowed me to look both within and across cases in my analysis to see how notions of literacy are constructed and understood in these different spaces.

My design has implications for the generalizability of my findings. Specifically, Dyson and Genishi (2005) argue that “the case can be compared to the particulars of other situations” so that “[situated] ‘truths’ or assumptions can be extended, modified, or complicated” (p. 116). My multiple, embedded case study design allowed me to challenge my assumptions, complicate my findings, and expand my conclusions by looking within and across cases at two different levels of analysis. Moreover, Erickson and Shultz (1992) argue that case studies, though necessarily context-specific, have the potential to generalize through theory construction. They explain:

Case study particularizes. It can report detailed information on the palpable texture of experience in a specific setting. But contrary to conventional assumptions in social research, case studies are not antithetical to generalization. They do stimulate and enable generalizing of a special and important kind. At its best, case study always involves theory
construction. Through narrative description a case study proposes (actually or in effect) a model or theory of the organization of phenomena that were observed and reported. The generality of the theory or model so proposed must be tested empirically by further observation. (p. 479)

I draw from the perspectives of eight students in two different intervention contexts as a way to complicate my analysis and, in turn, both inform and challenge the theoretical underpinnings of re-mediation in the context of ninth-grade literacy intervention classes.

**Settings and Participants**

I conducted my study in two different literacy intervention classes in different high schools and school districts in the San Francisco Bay Area. In this section, I introduce the classes and the students with whom I worked during the 2010-2011 school year.

**Northern High’s Enhanced Reading**

Northern High is the only high school in the Northern Unified School District (NUSD). During the study year approximately 3,500 students were enrolled at Northern High. NUSD did not have an articulated approach to literacy instruction between middle school and high school, and the teacher at this site, Mr. Taylor, reported that as the sole ninth-grade literacy teacher, he operated independently and with virtually no school- or district-level support.

Enhanced Reading is required for incoming students who are recommended to the class based on low grades and/or low California Standards Test (CST) scores by (a) their middle school teachers and counselors or (b) their Northern High teachers and counselors. Enhanced Reading supplements students’ regular English classes during their elective periods but the English and literacy classes are not connected in any way. The same teacher, Mr. Taylor, taught all five sections of Enhanced Reading during the study year. He also created the curriculum. The 2010-2011 course catalog description for Enhanced Reading describes the class as follows:

> In Enhanced Reading, students develop their reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, as well as practice literary response and analysis. They study novels, poetry, drama, short stories, and works of non-fiction. In addition, students do daily independent reading. Students can be referred to Enhanced Reading by middle school teachers and counselors based on their grades and standardized test scores, or by Northern High teachers and counselors based on CST scores.

The students who enrolled in Enhanced Reading during the study year were not representative of the general school population (see Table 2.1). For instance, 58% of the students enrolled in the literacy class at Northern High were Black/African American, which is more than twice the percentage of Black/African American students enrolled at the school (25%).6 Mr. Taylor taught five sections of Enhanced Reading, but, early in the school year, and in consultation with Mr. Taylor, I limited my data collection to the class

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6 Throughout this dissertation, I use the race/ethnicity categorizations employed by the schools and districts of which my two focal classrooms were a part.
that met during sixth period.

Mr. Taylor is a White male in his early 30s. He was in his tenth year of teaching during the study year. Mr. Taylor had graduated from an English Master’s program at a nearby university prior to taking a position as the developer and teacher of the Enhanced Reading class at Northern High. Before obtaining his Master’s and working at Northern High, Mr. Taylor was a special education teacher in New Orleans as part of the Teach For America program and then taught English as a Foreign Language overseas. Mr. Taylor described the purpose of Enhanced Reading as instilling readerly identities in his students.

I worked with four focal students in Northern High’s Enhanced Reading class: Dennis, Jack, Nicholas, and Victoria (see Table 2.2). I provide a brief introduction to each of these students below.

**Dennis.** Dennis is African American. He was expelled from school at the end of the first semester. Therefore, he did not continue as a focal participant in the second semester and my data on him is not complete. I include a brief description of him here because his experiences in Enhanced Reading nonetheless informed my analysis for the second research question.

**Jack.** Jack turned sixteen during December of the study year. He is Palestinian, Arabic is his first language, and Northern High identifies him as an English Learner and eligible for free lunch. In addition, Jack has a diagnosed learning disability, for which he has an IEP that provides him with some instructional accommodations. Jack’s accumulated GPA at the end of ninth grade was 3.5. He received mostly As and Bs on his ninth-grade report card, with one C in the second semester of algebra. He scored in the below basic category on the 2010 California Modified Assessment (CMA) and far below basic on the 2011 CMA. He wants to become a doctor so that he can return to Palestine and open a free clinic.

**Nicholas.** Nicholas turned fifteen during November of the study year. He is Asian, Nepalese is his first language, and Northern High identifies him as an English Learner. Nicholas has a 504 Plan for “processing” concerns, but he does not have a diagnosed disability or an IEP. Nicholas’ accumulated GPA at the end of ninth grade was 2.67 and his grades during his ninth-grade year were variable. He received As in Enhanced Reading, a B and then an A in algebra, Cs in history, a D and then a B in English, and a C and then an F in biology. Nicholas scored in the basic category on the 2010 CST and below basic on the 2011 CST. He plans to go to college after completing high school.

**Victoria.** Victoria turned fifteen during January of the study year. She is Latina, Spanish is her first language, and Northern High identifies her as an English Learner and eligible for free lunch. In addition, Victoria has a diagnosed learning disability, for which she has an IEP that provides her with some instructional accommodations. Victoria’s accumulated GPA at the end of ninth grade was 1.0 and she received mostly Ds and Fs on her ninth-grade report card. The exceptions were Enhanced Reading, where she received Cs both semesters, and global studies, where she received a C (up from a D) in the second semester. Victoria scored in the far below basic category on the 2010 and 2011 CSTs. Victoria wants to be an immigration lawyer.
Table 2.1
Student Percentages by Class and School, 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Northern High</th>
<th>Southern High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy Intervention Class (%)</td>
<td>School (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learners(^b)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8(^c)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Categories of particular interest are in boldface.

\(^a\)School-level percentages are based on data from the California DOE (2012) and have been rounded to the nearest 5% and, in some cases, slightly altered in order to maintain confidentiality.

\(^b\)English Learners refers to students who are not proficient in English. According to the California DOE (2012), “students are identified as English learners until they achieve district-specified scores on state achievement tests and meet other academic criteria.”

\(^c\)The percentage reported here is from 2009-2010. Northern High’s 2010-2011 English learner data was not certified by the district and is not reported.

Southern High’s Reading Workshop

Southern High is one of two comprehensive public high schools in the Southern Unified School District (SUSD). During the study year approximately 2,000 students were enrolled at the school. In the five years prior to my study, the district had invested in collaboration and professional development with the University of Kansas’ Center for Research on Learning to implement their Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) and Content Literacy Continuum (CLC) across content areas in middle and high schools in the district. The ninth-grade literacy intervention class, called Reading Workshop, was based on the University of Kansas’ Fusion Reading class, which served as a supplement to the cross-content SIM and CLC initiatives.

Reading Workshop was required for students who were placed into the class through a combination of (a) low eighth grade Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Assessment (GRADE) scores, (b) low CST scores, and (c) eighth grade English language arts teacher recommendations. Reading Workshop supplemented students’ regular English classes and was scheduled during their elective periods. However, students enrolled in Reading Workshop and English as a cohort, and the two Reading Workshop teachers shared responsibility for the two ninth-grade cohorts by each
teaching the literacy class to one cohort and the English class to the other cohort. The
2010-2011 course catalog description states:

Reading Workshop focuses on improving students’ reading
skills. Throughout the year, students focus on the development of the
following as readers: goal setting, word identification, fluency, word
knowledge, reading comprehension strategies, test-taking strategies, and
organization. The reading strategies are practiced extensively until they
are mastered and applied to grade level texts, including those they are
reading in their other classes. In addition, students will read from a
variety of high-interest fiction and non-fiction texts. The various texts are
a vehicle for learning specific skills and strategies. Students are placed in
Reading Workshop based on an 8th grade reading assessment, California
Standards Test (CST) scores, and 8th grade English Language Arts teacher
recommendations. Students in this class are placed in a section of
freshman English taught in conjunction with Reading Workshop to
provide additional support and structure in both classes.

Like the students in Enhanced Reading, the students who were enrolled in
Reading Workshop during the study year were not representative of the general
school population (see Table 2.1). For example, 31% of the students enrolled in
Reading Workshop were English learners, more than twice the percentage of
English learners enrolled at the school (15%). Though two teachers, Mrs. Cheung
and Mrs. Zachary, both taught Reading Workshop during the 2010-2011 school
year, I concentrated on Ms. Cheung’s first period literacy classroom because, of
the two teachers, she had more experience teaching the course and was one of the
teachers in the original cohort that had completed their professional development
training five years earlier.

Mrs. Cheung is a biracial (Chinese and White) female in her mid-30s. She
was in her twelfth year of teaching during the study year. Prior to that, Ms.
Cheung had worked in two other schools, a middle school for gifted and talented
students in a wealthy suburb and a charter middle school in a nearby city. Upon
arriving at Southern High, Ms. Cheung taught in the Advancement Via Individual
Determination Program before becoming more interested in literacy classes,
specifically. Five years earlier, she was involved in the original professional
development training for the Reading Workshop class. Since then, she had
become a professional developer for the program and served as a literacy coach
for other teachers and schools in the district in addition to a literacy teacher at
Southern High. In our preliminary conversations prior to the beginning of the
study, Mrs. Cheung described the purpose of Reading Workshop as providing
students with the strategies they require to access the academic curriculum across
subject areas.

I worked with four focal students in Southern High’s Reading Workshop:
Lily, Samantha, Tory, and Walter (see Table 2.2). I provide a brief introduction to
each of these students below.
Lily. Lily turned fourteen during December of the study year. She is White, and English is her first language; however, she spoke frequently of her family in Hawaii and, when I asked, identified herself as Hawaiian. She moved with her family to California from Hawaii several years earlier. However, she had been in the SUSD school district for just under two years at the time of the study. Lily’s accumulated GPA at the end of ninth grade was 2.0, and she received mostly Cs on her ninth-grade report card. The exceptions were Reading Workshop, where she received a B first semester and an A second semester, algebra, where she received a C first semester but an A second semester, and biology, where she received a D first semester and an F second semester. Lily scored in the basic category on the 2010 and 2011 CSTs. Lily wants to be a Naval officer and a nurse, paramedic, or firefighter like her father.

Samantha. Samantha turned fifteen during December of the study year. She is Chinese, but she was adopted as an infant and raised by English-speaking White parents. Samantha’s accumulated GPA at the end of ninth grade was 3.0. She received an equal distribution of As, Bs, and Cs on ninth-grade report card, with As and Bs in English and Reading Workshop, Bs in algebra, and Cs in biology. Samantha scored in the basic category on the 2010 CST and proficient on the 2011 CST. Samantha plans to go to college after completing high school but is unsure of what she wants to do after she completes her bachelor’s degree.

Tory. Tory turned fourteen during November of the study year. She is White and English is her first language. She lived with her mother—and talked about her often—but not her father. Tory received As and Bs in English and biology but had a D in algebra first semester and an F second semester. Ms. Cheung did not have Tory’s CST scores or proficiency levels recorded and hypothesized that this was because Tory had been placed into Reading Workshop based on a teacher recommendation rather than her test scores. Although Tory transferred out of Reading Workshop in the fall, she expressed interest in remaining in the study. I decided to continue working with her because I thought she would provide a useful point of contrast to the other three focal students. Tory wants to be a radiologic technician like her mother.

Walter. Walter turned sixteen during December of the study year. He is White, speaks English as a first language, and has a diagnosed learning disability for which he has an IEP. However, Ms. Cheung did not know the exact nature of his diagnosis. Walter’s accumulated GPA at the end of ninth grade was 2.67. He received mostly Bs on his ninth-grade report card. The exceptions were English, where he received a C both semesters, and algebra, where he received a D both semesters. Walter scored in the below basic category on the 2010 CMA and basic on the 2011 CMA. Walter wants to attend a two-year program at a local community college that would allow him to get a job at the airport working on planes.
Table 2.2
Focal Students by School, Literacy Intervention Class, and Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern High</td>
<td>Enhanced Reading</td>
<td>Mr. Taylor</td>
<td>Dennis(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\approx 3,500) students</td>
<td>(10% English Learners; 30% Free/Reduced Price Meals)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nicholas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern High</td>
<td>Reading Workshop</td>
<td>Ms. Cheung</td>
<td>Lily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\approx 2,000) students</td>
<td>(15% English Learners; 20% Free/Reduced Price Meals)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tory(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Walter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Dennis was expelled from school in Winter 2011 and did not continue to participate in the study beyond that point.
\(^b\)Tory transferred out of Reading Workshop in Fall 2010 but she remained in the study as a focal participant.

**Researcher Role**

From the first day of observations in both literacy intervention classes, I positioned myself as a participant observer. However, as Patton (2002) notes, “The extent of participation is a continuum that varies from complete immersion in the setting as full participant to complete separation from the setting as spectator, with a great deal of variation along the continuum between these two end points” (p. 265). My position on the continuum between participant and observer varied throughout the year. However, at all times, I was careful to participate in similar ways in the two classrooms and only in those activities in which students and teachers participated together as part of building a classroom community. In order to become a member of the two classroom communities—at least peripherally—my role fell more on the participant end of the continuum during the first few days and weeks of the fall semester. Over time, and as students became increasingly accustomed to my presence, I found that I faded into the background and assumed more of an observatory role in both classrooms. I intentionally positioned myself in this way because this role allowed me to identify myself as an outsider while also, and crucially, distinguishing me from the students’ teachers.

In order to establish my non-student, non-teacher role in the classroom, I participated in the get-to-know-you activities in both classrooms at the beginning of the year and used these activities to explicitly state my role as a researcher to the students. In Ms. Cheung’s class, this entailed sharing my “personal museum” with the class. The teacher shared her personal museum on the first day of class, and I shared my personal museum on the second day, along with five students. The goal of the personal museum presentations was for the students to learn more about each other by sharing selected...
personal information about themselves through artifacts depicting or representing family, friends, favorite past times, etc. At the request of the principal, I passed out a letter of introduction at the end of my personal museum presentation, which read:

August 31, 2010

Dear Parents and Guardians,

My name is Kate Frankel, and I am a graduate student in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. I wanted to introduce myself to you because I will be spending time in Mrs. Cheung’s Reading Workshop this school year. As a former English teacher, I am interested in how students think and learn about reading and writing. I’m very excited to be in the classroom assisting Mrs. Cheung, and I will be communicating further with you in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Kate Frankel

In Mr. Taylor’s class, the beginning of the year get-to-know-you activity was writing letters to the teacher. The purpose of the letters was to give the students an opportunity to introduce themselves and their feelings about reading to the teacher. Mr. Taylor shared his letter with the class on the first day of school and then the students wrote letters back to him. I also wrote a letter, which I shared with the students about two weeks into the school year as a way to introduce myself and state my purpose in the classroom. My letter read:

September 15, 2010

Dear Students,

At this point, you’re probably wondering who I am and what I’m doing sitting in the back of your 6th period classroom. So, I’d like to tell you a little bit about myself and why I’m here. Hopefully, I’ll be able to answer most of your questions in the next few minutes.

My name is Kate Frankel, and I’m a graduate student in the Graduate School of Education at UC-Berkeley. I’m just starting my 4th year of graduate school, but I still have 1 or 2 more years to go. Sometimes I feel like I’ll be in school forever! I moved to California three years ago so that I could go to school at Cal. Moving here was exciting but also a little bit scary because I’d never spent much time on the West Coast.

I grew up near Chicago, Illinois, which is very different from growing up in [name of city]. For one, we used to get lots of days off from school in the winter—some of these days were called “snow days” and others were called “cold days” (because it was so cold that if you had to stand outside and wait for the bus, you might get frostbite). Even though I grew up in the Midwest, both my mom and dad are from Maine. So, I spent a lot of time on the East Coast as a child and, later, went to college in New Hampshire. After college, I taught high school English in Massachusetts. I’ve also lived in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island.
I decided to go to graduate school because I’m interested in studying reading and writing and because someday I hope to be a university professor. While lots of people have written about reading and writing, I’ve been surprised to find that the research in this area often does not talk to students about what they have to say about how they learn best. Because of this, I’m writing my dissertation (does anyone know what that means?!) on what students have to say about reading, writing, and school. You are the experts, and I’m hoping to spend this school year learning from you.

Sincerely,

Kate Frankel

The participant-observer role was not without its complications. One afternoon in early September, for instance, there was a substitute teacher in Mr. Taylor’s Enhanced Reading class. With Mr. Taylor absent, several students turned to me with their questions. One student asked me to help her find a new independent reading book. Another student asked me if she could go to the water fountain. These questions forced me to define my role in the classroom—for the students’ benefit as well as my own. While I was willing to assist the former student in her quest for a new book, I told the latter student that she had to ask the substitute teacher, not me, for permission to leave class. Later that period, when Dennis, one of the (future) focal students, began antagonizing his classmates with pointed questions clearly meant to incite them, I did not react despite the awkwardness of the situation and the clear lack of interest and authority exhibited by the substitute teacher. I did not intervene in this instance because I felt that by calling attention to the student’s behavior or reprimanding him in any way, I would assume an authoritative, teacher-like role in the classroom, which would undermine my ability to talk honestly with students about their experiences in school. I describe this class period here because, in addition to teaching me to avoid future classes where the teacher was absent, it prompted me to reflect on my role in the classroom and position myself accordingly. This conscious positioning was not a one-time decision, however. Rather, I found that I had to navigate my role carefully in both classrooms throughout the school year.

Data Collection

In order to answer my research questions, I collected data in three phases during the 2010-2011 school year (see Table 2.3). The first phase from September to January was a period of preliminary data collection where I spent concentrated time observing and audio recording the literacy intervention classes, interviewing the literacy teachers, and selecting and interviewing my focal students. The primary purpose of this phase was to gather preliminary and background data on the literacy classes, literacy teachers, and focal students. The second phase from January to May involved targeted data collection for each of my focal students. During this phase I observed and audio recorded my focal students in all of their classes, interviewed them about their classes and teachers, and interviewed all of their teachers. The main purpose of this phase was to understand my focal students in the context of different classes and in relation to different teachers. In the third phase from May to July I continued targeted data collection for each of my focal students by observing and audio recording them in their literacy intervention classes;
making copies of their classwork; and interviewing them, their literacy teachers and, where possible, their parents. During this phase I also collected anonymous student survey and demographic data and interviewed selected administrators for additional information about the two literacy classes. The purpose of this phase was twofold: to understand the literacy classes from the perspectives of my focal students and to gather general and background information on the literacy classes and the students enrolled in them.

Table 2.3
Data Collection Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>September 2010 to January 2011</td>
<td>Preliminary Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy teacher interviews (#1 of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focal student interviews (#1 of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes (literacy classes only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audio recordings (literacy classes only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom artifacts (literacy classes only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>January to May 2011</td>
<td>Targeted Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy teacher interviews (#2 of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Other teacher interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focal student interviews (#2 of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes (all focal student classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audio recordings (all focal student classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom artifacts (all focal student classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>May to July 2011</td>
<td>Targeted and Wrap-up Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy teacher interviews (#3 of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focal student interviews (#3 of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Administrator interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent interviews</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes (literacy classes only)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audio recordings (literacy classes only)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom artifacts (literacy classes only)</td>
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<td>• Classroom photographs (literacy classes only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Anonymous student surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focal student work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Background information (for focal students and literacy classes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources

Data sources for this study fall into five main categories: interviews, observations, artifacts, surveys, and other information (see Table 2.4).
Interviews

**Student interviews.** I interviewed seven of my eight focal students three times, once during the fall semester (data collection phase one) and twice during the spring semester (data collection phases two and three). I interviewed the eighth focal student, Dennis, only once because he was expelled from school at the end of the first semester and did not participate in the study beyond that point. I included Dennis’ interview for a total of 22 student interviews because it was part of the corpus of data that I analyzed in order to answer my second research question. Student interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Both Mrs. Cheung and Mr. Taylor permitted their students to be interviewed during class time. I therefore allowed the students to choose whether they wanted to interview during class or after school. In the first interview I asked students questions about reading and writing and their histories as readers and writers. In the second interview I asked about their experiences in school and with specific teachers. In the third interview I asked about their literacy classes and their strengths and weaknesses as students (see Appendix A).

**Teacher interviews.** I interviewed the two literacy teachers, Mrs. Cheung and Mr. Taylor, three times each and at points in the year that coincided roughly with the focal student interviews. Literacy teacher interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes, with most lasting an hour or more, and took place in the teachers’ classrooms after class. In the first interview I asked Mrs. Cheung and Mr. Taylor about themselves, their literacy classes (e.g., history of the class, pedagogical approach, placement criteria), and their students. In the second and third interviews, I asked them follow-up questions about themselves and their classes, as well as specific questions about the focal students (see Appendix B).

In addition, I interviewed each of my focal students’ other ninth-grade teachers in English, history, math, science, academic support, Spanish, art, and other electives after spending one or two days observing in their classes. I did not observe any history classes or interview any history teachers at Southern High because ninth graders at this school did not take history during their first year of high school. I conducted a total of 27 other teacher interviews, which lasted anywhere from 10 to 60 minutes. At times, I would interview one teacher about multiple students. For example, because students at Southern High moved from Reading Workshop to English as a cohort, their English teacher, Mrs. Zachary, taught all four of my focal students. At Northern High, Jack’s algebra teacher was also Victoria’s advisor, so I asked him questions about both students during our interview. I often found that interviewing one teacher about multiple students was particularly fruitful, as it allowed the teacher to compare and contrast across students. I asked teachers general questions about their classes and instructional approaches, but I also dedicated a large portion of these interviews to specific questions about the teachers’ perceptions about my focal students’ strengths and weaknesses in the classroom (see Appendix B).

**Parent interviews.** I interviewed two parents: Jack’s father (approximately 20 minutes) and Lily’s father (approximately 50 minutes). Although I had intended to interview the parents of all my focal students, six of the eight parents indicated on the permission form that they were not interested in being involved in the study. I asked the
two fathers questions about their children’s histories with literacy and schooling, as well as their perceptions about their children as readers and learners (see Appendix C).

**Other interviews with school and district personnel.** Finally, I interviewed seven other school and district personnel who I felt could provide insight into the roles of the literacy classes at the two school sites. There were six individuals in SUSD who fit this criterion and were willing to meet with me but only one in NUSD, which makes sense in light of SUSD’s stated commitment to their literacy program compared with Mr. Taylor’s relative isolation as the sole literacy teacher at Northern High. These interviews lasted anywhere from 10 to 40 minutes. In SUSD, I interviewed Southern High’s principal and one of its counselors, the assistant superintendent, the literacy teacher at the other high school in the district, the now-retired initiator of the literacy program, and the current literacy program coordinator and professional developer. At Northern High, I interviewed the vice principal who oversaw the Enhanced Reading class. In these interviews I sought information about the past, present, and future roles of the literacy classes at the school and, for Reading Workshop, in the district (see Appendix D).

**Observations**

I observed the two ninth-grade literacy classes daily during the first three weeks of the fall semester. Thereafter I observed one 1.5-hour Reading Workshop class and two 1-hour Enhanced Reading classes each week across all three phases of data collection. Because Mr. Taylor asked his students to spend the first 20 minutes of each class engaged in silent reading, the amount of instructional time I spent observing in each class on a given week was approximately the same: 90 minutes in one Reading Workshop block period at Southern High and 80 minutes (excluding the 40 minutes of silent reading) over two Enhanced Reading periods at Northern High. I alternated the days of the week that I observed in each class in order to capture the daily operations of the classes throughout the week and not just on a particular day. I took extensive notes, what Lofland and Lofland (1995) call “jotted notes” (p. 20) in spiral notebooks—I kept separate notebooks for Reading Workshop and Enhanced Reading—during my classroom observations and related interviews. I returned to my desk as soon as possible after each observation period in order to translate my notes into full field notes. Typically, this meant that I composed formal field notes within an hour or two of leaving the classroom. Starting at the beginning of October in Reading Workshop and the end of October in Enhanced Reading, I audio recorded all classroom observations as a supplement to my field notes. I selectively transcribed these audio recordings during data analysis by identifying key moments in my field notes and then transcribing those moments and embedding them into the field note data.

In the second phase of data collection, I shadowed my focal students for two full school days each in order to observe them in the context of their other ninth-grade classes. Where possible, I shadowed one student on two consecutive days in order to maintain continuity in my observations. From time to time, teacher absences or other scheduling problems arose, in which case it was necessary to conduct the second observation on a non-consecutive day. If more than one focal student was in a particular class, I visited that class more often so that I could maintain my focus on one student per observation. For example, I observed seven English classes at Southern High (two each for Samantha, Tory, and Walter and one for Lily) because all four of my focal students
were in the class together. However, though only one student was my focus during these observations, I took notes on other focal students when I felt it was appropriate. In addition to my field notes, I also audio recorded most of these class periods and selectively transcribed them as described above. Once in a while I did not record a class, either at the request of the teacher (e.g., Samantha and Tory’s art teacher did not want me to audio record her teaching) or at a time when I felt it was not appropriate to do so (e.g., during a confidential discussion about safe sex initiated by Northern High health counselors in Jack and Nicholas’ history class).

Artifacts

Students in both literacy classes kept collections of their work in their classrooms as part of the requirements for their courses. Reading Workshop students kept their worksheets in binders that remained on a shelf at the front of the classroom. Enhanced Reading students kept notebooks at their desks in which they completed the assignments that Mr. Taylor wrote on the board or, less frequently, passed out on slips of paper. I looked through my focal students’ binders and notebooks several times during the year, but I waited until the end of the school year to make copies of them. After checking with the teacher to confirm that the binders and notebooks were complete (i.e., no other assignments would be added to them before the last day of school), I brought them home and scanned all relevant material into my computer during a weekend in early June. I scanned all the pages that my focal students had written on in their Enhanced Reading notebooks. However, when I turned to the Reading Workshop binders, I made decisions about what to scan and not scan because of the large number of worksheets and other student work that was in them. For example, for each Reading Workshop unit, I scanned the worksheets that represented a student’s best and worst grades for that unit. I also scanned additional assignments that coincided with work that I had scanned for other focal students. This ensured that I would have points of comparison for Reading Workshop students as I did for the Enhanced Reading students. In addition, I obtained and copied 10 independent reading letter essays written by the Reading Workshop focal students to their English teacher over the course of the school year.

At the beginning of the school year, students in both literacy classes wrote letters to their teachers that introduced themselves and discussed their histories as readers. Because I had not selected focal students at this point in the school year, I made anonymous copies of all of these student letters and, later on, only identified the authors of the ones written by my focal students. I collected a total of 46 letters—20 from the focal class at Southern High, 17 from the other literacy class at Southern High, and 9 from the focal class at Northern High.

I also collected all worksheets and other handouts that were distributed during the classes that I observed, took photographs of the literacy classrooms, and compiled a folder of miscellaneous institutional documents that I came across during my fieldwork.

Surveys

In addition to writing introductory letters to their teachers, the students in both literacy classes completed surveys at the beginning of the year. The Reading Workshop surveys asked students about their familiarity with a series of learning strategies taught in Fusion Reading classes and the name of their favorite middle school group-reading book
from that class. The Enhanced Reading surveys asked students about their reading histories and the types of books they enjoy reading. I collected a total of 29 beginning-of-year surveys from the two focal classrooms.

During the third phase of data collection, I created and administered anonymous surveys to students in every literacy class at the two school sites, for a total of seven classes and 86 completed surveys. These surveys asked students questions about their favorite and least favorite classes and characteristics of helpful and unhelpful teachers (see Appendix E).

Finally, I obtained copies of 30 anonymous end-of-year student surveys that were completed by students in the two Reading Workshop classes. Though Mr. Taylor had planned to administer a survey of his own in his Enhanced Reading classes, he decided at the last minute to have students write letters rather than complete a survey.

Other Information

I collected relevant demographic and performance data on my focal students at the end of the school year. These data included:

- Date of birth
- Ethnicity
- Language(s) spoken
- Language proficiency
- Fall and spring semester final grades
- IEP information
- CST or CMA scores
- GRADE test scores (for Reading Workshop students)
- California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores

In addition, I collected the following anonymous demographic and performance data for all literacy students at the end of the school year through the SUSD and NUSD research offices:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Disability status
- EL status/language proficiency
- Ninth-grade GPA
- Name of middle school
- 2008 ELA CST and CMA scores (for Enhanced Reading students)
- 2009 ELA CST and CMA scores
- 2010 ELA CST and CMA scores
- 2011 ELA CST and CMA scores
- 2010 GRADE test scores (for Reading Workshop students)
- 2011 GRADE test scores (for Reading Workshop students)

I also requested Free/Reduced Lunch status, an indicator of socioeconomic status, for students enrolled in the literacy classes, but the district research offices were unable to provide this information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong>&lt;br&gt;N=58</td>
<td>• 22 interviews with focal students (3 interviews each during data collection phases one, two, and three, plus 1 interview with Dennis during phase one; approximately 16 hours of audio data)&lt;br&gt;• 6 interviews with literacy teachers (3 interviews each during data collection phases one, two, and three; approximately 7 hours of audio data)&lt;br&gt;• 21 interviews with focal students’ other teachers (approximately 8 hours of audio data)&lt;br&gt;• 2 interviews with selected focal students’ parents (approximately 1 hour of audio data)&lt;br&gt;• 7 interviews with other school and district personnel (approximately 3 hours of audio data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong>&lt;br&gt;N=153</td>
<td>• 98 field notes from literacy classes&lt;br&gt;• Approximately 76 hours of selectively transcribed audio data from literacy classes&lt;br&gt;• 55 field notes from focal students’ other classes&lt;br&gt;• Approximately 58 hours of selectively transcribed audio data from focal students’ other classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>• 69 pieces of focal student work from literacy classes&lt;br&gt;• 10 focal student independent reading letter essays (Reading Workshop students only)&lt;br&gt;• 46 anonymous student introduction letters&lt;br&gt;• Handouts and worksheets from focal students’ classes&lt;br&gt;• Institutional documents&lt;br&gt;• 38 photographs of literacy classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surveys</strong>&lt;br&gt;N=145</td>
<td>• 29 anonymous beginning-of-year student surveys (focal classes only)&lt;br&gt;• 86 anonymous student surveys on favorite/least favorite classes and helpful/unhelpful teachers&lt;br&gt;• 30 anonymous end-of-year student surveys (Reading Workshop classes only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Information</strong></td>
<td>• Focal student demographic data&lt;br&gt;• Focal student class placement data and relevant standardized test scores&lt;br&gt;• Focal student fall and spring semester final grades&lt;br&gt;• Anonymous demographic and performance data for all literacy students</td>
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Data Analysis

In my initial analysis of the data, I began by uploading all of my field notes, interview transcripts, and electronic copies of my focal students’ work to the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti. I read through the data in chunks, focusing on and triangulating data for one student at a time, before beginning first-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009) of the data across students and data sources. I employed a hybrid coding strategy involving a set of descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009). I used a simultaneous coding technique (Saldaña, 2009) frequently in this phase of analysis as a way to capture the richness of the data while also beginning to identify codes that might co-occur across students and data sources.

After the initial round of coding was complete, I ran a series of queries within the ATLAS.ti program and then generated preliminary data reports related to my three research questions.

Data Analysis for Research Question 1: What are the institutional and pedagogical conditions under which Mr. Taylor and his students operated in Enhanced Reading and Ms. Cheung and her students operated in Reading Workshop? How do these conditions shape re-mediation in the two classes?

My data reports for the first research question drew from field notes and selected transcriptions of audio-recorded classroom observations and interviews with school and district personnel and literacy and other teachers at the two school sites. In order to generate the data for these reports, I first created super-codes within ATLAS.ti for each of the two literacy classes. Next, I pulled data related to these two super-codes and generated separate data reports for conditions in Enhanced Reading and conditions in Reading Workshop. I began second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009) with this subset of data and identified twelve sub-codes related to the conditions under which the two classes operated. From there, I created within-case displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for each class and its corresponding school and district based on these sub-codes before creating a cross-case, conceptually ordered matrix in order to look at similarities and differences in conditions across sites. I identified six dimensions (history and organization of the course, support for the course/teacher, student placement criteria, course effectiveness, post-ninth-grade supports for students, and the future of the course) to focus on specifically in order to illuminate the very different conditions under which the two classes operated.

Data Analysis for Research Question 2: How do students’ understandings of literacy and learning and their own academic identities interact with the understandings of their teachers in the context of the two literacy intervention classes?

My data reports for the second research question drew primarily from field notes and selected transcriptions of audio-recorded classroom observations of the focal students in their ninth-grade literacy classes, focal student writing and other coursework, and interviews with focal students and literacy teachers. In order to generate these reports, I created super-codes that captured students’ perspectives on a range of topics related to their current and prior experiences in school and with reading and writing. I created within-case displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for each focal student, each of which included the following dimensions: Reading-Interview 1, Reading-Interview 3, Reading-
Changes, Writing-Interview 1, Writing-Interview 3, Writing-Changes, School-Definition of Success, School-Changes, Strengths, and Weaknesses. Next, I created a cross case, conceptually ordered matrix in order to look more closely at patterns across students. I simplified this matrix to include four dimensions, including (a) students’ beliefs about what it takes to be a good reader, (b) students’ beliefs about how they have changed as readers, (c) students’ beliefs about what it takes to be a good writer, and (d) students’ beliefs about how they have changed as writers. I used this matrix in order to identify contrasts in the focal students’ perspectives on reading and writing and targeted Jack and Dennis in Enhanced Reading and Samantha and Taylor in Reading Workshop because they represented contrasting perspectives within each class. Up to this point, my analysis focused only on student interview data. Therefore, I pulled two additional types of data reports for these four students. The first type of report compiled observation and artifact data related to Jack, Dennis, Samantha, and Tory during the first semester of their respective literacy classes. The second type of report compiled data related to the literacy teacher’s perceptions about the literacy classes as well as their reflections on the individual focal students who I had identified to focus on in order to answer this research question. Finally, after integrating the data from interviews, observations, and student and class artifacts, I juxtaposed the perspectives of the two literacy teachers with the perspectives of the four focal students in order to demonstrate the ways in which the students were successful or unsuccessful in their classes.

**Data Analysis for Research Question 3:** *How do students’ understandings of the literacy and learning objectives and outcomes of their literacy classes interact with their emerging identities as readers and students?*

My data reports for the third research question drew primarily from field notes and selected transcriptions of audio-recorded classroom observations of the focal students in their ninth-grade literacy classes, focal student writing and other coursework, and interviews with focal students and literacy teachers. In order to generate these reports, I again created super-codes related specifically to students’ perspectives on their literacy classes and how they had changed as readers, writers, and students over the year. Next, I created two within-case displays (Saldaña, 2009)—one for each class—with two dimensions: (a) the most useful thing learned in the students’ literacy class and (b) students’ self-perceptions as readers at the end of the year. I juxtaposed these displays in order to see patterns in the perspectives of students across classes before incorporating the teachers’ perspectives on the classes into the displays in order to compare and contrast across both students and teachers. From there, I selected two focal students—Victoria in Enhanced Reading and Lily in Reading Workshop—to focus on in order to answer this research question because their perspectives were the ones that were most closely aligned with their teacher’s perspectives on the objectives of the classes. I pulled two final reports that isolated observation and artifact data for Victoria and Lily during the second semester of their literacy classes and other content area classes and used this information to supplement and enhance my analyses of the interview data.

Throughout the data analysis process, I took a number of precautions in order to attend to the internal validity of my analysis. Specifically, for each research question, I triangulated and crosschecked my findings across data sources to look for confirming and disconfirming evidence. In addition, I met regularly with groups of other qualitative
researchers, comprised of professors and graduate students with strong theoretical and methodological groundings in literacy research, for frequent analytic checks of my emerging findings. I brought raw data, analytic memos, and writing drafts to these groups in order to discuss my analyses and preliminary findings with them. In all cases, these research meetings prompted me to consider alternate explanations and, on many occasions, compelled me to return to the data in order to refine my analysis and clarify my findings.
CHAPTER THREE
INSTITUTIONAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXTS

In this chapter, I examine the district- and school-level contexts in which the two literacy classes operated and explore how these contexts influenced the structure of the classrooms themselves in order to answer the first research question: *What are the institutional and pedagogical conditions under which Mr. Taylor and his students operated in Enhanced Reading and Ms. Cheung and her students operated in Reading Workshop? How do these conditions shape re-mediation in the two classes?*

I argue that the different communities in which the teachers participated outside their literacy classrooms affected the types of student-teacher interactions that existed in the classrooms. Through my analysis, I demonstrate the difficulties that arose for Mr. Taylor as a result of having virtually no institutional support and, therefore, being necessarily focused on the community of his Enhanced Reading classroom at the expense of other communities at the school. His experience contrasts with the tensions that arose for Ms. Cheung as a result of having much more institutional support and, as a result, foci in multiple different communities beyond the immediate Reading Workshop classroom. I also discuss how other teachers and administrators representing other communities at the two schools perceived the role of the literacy classes and the corresponding characteristics of the students who take these classes and the teachers who teach them. Ultimately, I demonstrate how the two different contexts influenced the teachers’ perspectives on their respective literacy classes and, in turn, the types of student-teacher interactions that occurred in these spaces.

The Classroom Community of Enhanced Reading

Mr. Taylor worked in almost complete isolation from administrators and other teachers at Northern High. This isolation was due in part to the history and organization of the Enhanced Reading class at the school. Mr. Taylor’s isolation meant that he had the freedom to change and adapt his curriculum as he saw fit in order to meet the needs of his students, but it also meant that he was not always supported in his endeavors by the other teaching and administrating communities of the school. The lack of institutional support for the Enhanced Reading class affected how students were placed into the class, what was known about the effectiveness of the class, and the supports that were available to students after ninth grade.

History and Organization

During the study year, Mr. Taylor was in his sixth year of teaching. The idea for the course originated in 2005 as a result of Northern High’s Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation process that year. One of the recommendations that came out of the WASC accreditation was to develop a reading intervention class for incoming ninth-grade students. When Mr. Taylor applied to Northern High, he did not know about the plan for the class, but, ultimately, he was hired specifically to develop and teach it. Mr. Taylor’s dual responsibility of developing and teaching the class was highlighted in the Vice Principal’s description of the class:

So we designed it, we designed a course, um, about six years ago to provide, um, literacy support to many of our students who were struggling, um, as they entered
Northern High. Um, Mr. Taylor, um, was given the responsibility, um, at the time of designing the course. (Vice Principal Interview, 8-19-11)

Since Mr. Taylor had sole responsibility for the design, implementation, and teaching of the Enhanced Reading course, the school only provided the structure that led to the creation of the course in the first place.

Support

Mr. Taylor had some initial support to design the course, but that was the extent of the support he received from the school:

I’m very isolated. … Any support I get has to me, has to come from me searching it out and often I don’t even know who to search it out from or what’s even available for me. This class has been a hundred percent designed by me. I’ve had no, there’s been no accountability on like how I’m doing, which you might think is a good thing for some people, but … I could’ve used some pushing or some help to further it along, as opposed to me just trying to figure out everything to make it better. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

As Mr. Taylor observes, to some extent the lack of involvement from school administrators allowed him to do what he wanted to do in class. However, the lack of support also meant that Mr. Taylor did not have access to other communities that might have challenged him and given him constructive feedback on the class.

Some insights into the lack of knowledge about and support for the Enhanced Reading class came from the responses I received to my inquiries about the other people I should speak with about the course. When I asked Mr. Taylor this question, he explained that he could not name a single person who could tell me more about the class:

I don’t think anyone knows about this class. Some people know some things, but I think I know the most. … Last year and then previous to that it seems like it was a different vice principal each year so there’s no like longevity, and they might be able to tell you about how they recruited students like three years ago, but I think I pretty much know similar to what I did. Um, the principal stopped in my class today to wish everyone a good spring break. That’s the second time he’s been in this classroom. The first time my student teacher was teaching. And, he was in here for a minute, literally a minute, and his phone went off, so he left. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

Here, Mr. Taylor reveals that not only does no one at the school support him in his teaching, but no one even knows what goes on in his classroom on a daily, weekly, or even yearly basis.

Mr. Taylor’s perceptions about the lack of knowledge of and support for Enhanced Reading were reinforced at the administrative level, as counselor and administrator responses echoed Mr. Taylor’s belief that no one really knows anything about his Enhanced Reading class. For example, when I contacted the counselor assigned to Jack, Nicholas, and Victoria in order to arrange a time to speak with her about those students as well as the Enhanced Reading course itself, she declined to meet, writing, “I’m not sure I have a strong perspective on the class. I would strongly recommend you speak to the teacher instead, Mark Taylor” (Counselor Email, 5-11-11). Similarly, after
attempting to contact the Principal to learn more about the course from his perspective, I received a response from one of the vice principals instead. In our interview, this vice principal also directed me to Mr. Taylor for more information, explaining that the class “was [Mr. Taylor’s] baby to create, you know, so he’s definitely the, the person to talk to, um, he can give you all the nuts and bolts about how it was designed” (Vice Principal Interview, 8-19-11). The Vice Principal then went on to articulate the administration’s role in relation to Mr. Taylor and the course: “From our end simply just give him the support, the resources, offering the course, giving him the resources that he needs and finding the kids to put in his class” (Vice Principal Interview, 8-19-11). The Vice Principal’s characterization of the administration’s support of Mr. Taylor and his Enhanced Reading class is vague and distinctly hands-off. I will explore his last example of support—“finding the kids to put in his class”—in more depth in the next section on student placement because this specific type of support was notably inconsistent over time.

Mr. Taylor did note one possible exception to the general lack of knowledge about his class: English teachers “who have my students and see that this kid is reading all these books” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11). Indeed, there were some exceptions. In particular, the English and special education teachers with whom I spoke were supportive of the class and had some knowledge about it, if not always a deep understanding of what exactly it entailed. Jack and Nicholas’ English teacher, for example, understood that the class “gets a lot of kids hooked into reading” (NH English Teacher #2 Interview, 5-4-11). She articulated her explicit support for the class and her personal perspective on how it was helping her students:

I think it’s a great class, first of all, I want to completely support him. Um, I mean I think what I’ve seen from this class that really impresses me always, has always impressed me since I’ve been here, is, one, he has an amazing collection of books that students, I mean I have seen students off task in my class reading books that they got in Mr. Taylor’s. Highly engaging, um, at the right reading level. … I think that kids feel supported, they don’t seem to feel stigmatized by it, I mean, they’ll say out loud things like, “Oh, I’m gonna go to, you know, Taylor’s room to get a book.” I mean, it’s not, um, so I, I think it’s a pretty invaluable class. (NH English Teacher #2 Interview, 5-4-11)

Similarly, Jack’s academic support teacher, who was also Nicholas’ advisor, observed that students in Enhanced Reading “come to really enjoy reading when often they had negative associations with it before” (NH Special Education Teacher #1 Interview, 4-19-11). She attributed this transformation in part to the fact that “Mr. Taylor has all these books that are really appealing and enticing” and highlighted the role of the class in “getting students comfortable with reading both out loud and on their own and then building fluency and hopefully helping them discover a joy for reading” (NH Special Education Teacher #1 Interview, 4-19-11). Through their work with the focal students and other students who were enrolled in Enhanced Reading, the English teachers and special education teachers at Northern High had opportunities to see how the class impacted their students’ relationships with reading and they indicated their support of the class as a result of this knowledge.

However, not all teachers at Northern High were familiar with Enhanced Reading.
Without exception, the focal students’ other teachers in history, math, and science stated their explicit lack of knowledge about the Enhanced Reading course and its role at the school. Victoria’s global studies teacher, for example, began and ended her discussion of the course with caveats such as “I know very little about it” (NH Global Studies Teacher Interview, 5-11-11). Similarly, Nicholas’ algebra teacher admitted, “To be honest, I don’t know anything about them” (NH Math Teacher #1 Interview, 5-4-11), and Victoria’s Algebra teacher said, “I don’t know a ton about it. I just know that it’s extra support…for students to improve their reading level” (NH Math Teacher #2 Interview, 5-13-11). Likewise, both science teachers with whom I spoke framed their understandings of the role of Enhanced Reading in terms of what they would “like to think” or would “imagine” it did rather than what they knew it to do.

Jack and Nicholas’ history teacher did not even hazard a guess at the role of Enhanced Reading. Instead, she focused on her lack of knowledge about the course and what it revealed about the many missed opportunities for collaboration between Mr. Taylor’s classes and her own:

What’s the role? I don’t know, we’re not, I mean I know hella of my kids have it but we’re not united and like connecting and I feel like it’s such an underutilized potential connection, like, that we could have curricular alignment, we could have like common benchmarks and things that I am emphasizing in terms of reading strategies, like I don’t know what strategies he’s using and I would be so open to incorporating them and using the language, I think the more that there’s a common thread that kids, especially with this level, that kids are getting the same message about how to do things, the way more effective it would be. And because our kids are so low skilled and we have just such a higher rate of kids who are in Taylor’s class than I think probably any other program, maybe. So yeah, as always, I mean that takes coordination and time, you know, who’s gonna take that initiative and standardization which I think a lot of people at Northern High are very anti standardization and I think it’s a huge disservice to the kids to have so much autonomy. Cuz they get confused. (NH History Teacher Interview, 4-20-11)

In her observations about the lack of curricular alignment between her history class and Mr. Taylor’s Enhanced Reading class, this teacher echoes some of Mr. Taylor’s own frustrations about the lack of collaborative structures that are in place at the school. Rather than faulting Mr. Taylor for failing to coordinate with her, however, she cites other, more systemic obstacles. In particular, she notes that creating collaborative structures would require “coordination and time” as well as a level of buy-in that most people at Northern High do not have. Implicit in her critique is an underlying sense that Northern High does not encourage or facilitate collaborations like the one she envisions.

**Student Placement**

The passive and hands-off nature of the administration’s support of Mr. Taylor and his Enhanced Reading class discussed earlier took on an actively unsupportive tone in the spring prior to the study year when a different vice principal at the school told Mr. Taylor that, if he could not personally find enough students to place into his Enhanced Reading classes, he “would have just like one, ah, maybe two or three sections [of Enhanced Reading], and, and then teach, yeah, something else” (Mr. Taylor Interview,
Though Mr. Taylor noted that this threat, which did not come to fruition during the study year, was something that came from a single administrator and not the whole administration, he found it to be a disconcerting and anxiety-producing experience that reinforced his perspective on the distinct lack of administrative support for himself and his class.

Although the Vice Principal quoted above indicated that a major component of the administrative support for Enhanced Reading was “finding the kids to put in his class,” Mr. Taylor highlighted this piece of his responsibilities, what he referred to as “scheduling,” as one of the most frustrating and isolating of all:

I’ve had nightmares every year, um, with that issue. Scheduling. This year has been the best, I’ve had the fullest classes on day one. … I’ve had first days where I’ve had classes with one person in the class or two people in the class and there’s been a lot of just confusion, there’s never been an official way to get the kids in the class. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

Mr. Taylor notes that “this year has been the best” in terms of having enough students enrolled in his classes from the beginning of the fall semester. But, in our first interview, he explained that this success stemmed from the previously mentioned threat by a previous vice principal to cut his Enhanced Reading classes if he, Mr. Taylor, did not find a sufficient number of students to enroll in his classes:

Last year, I don’t know if I told you this. I have, I was given basically an ultimatum. I had a week or two weeks to find the names of, you know, a hundred plus students while I was teaching full time, not having any training or where, or knowing how to do it. And I just did it. But it was hard and I had some people who were really nice who helped me. But I had to search those people out and I didn’t immediately know who those people were and the powers that be did not point me to those people. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

Mr. Taylor recounted this experience with a tone of indignation and ongoing disbelief. Underlying his description of what happened the previous spring is a sense that the process of identifying students for the class had not been consistent as well as the suggestion that the vice principal who gave this “ultimatum” was actively setting Mr. Taylor up to fail. In a later interview, Mr. Taylor went into more detail about the complicated nature of the placement process and again noted the lack of direction or involvement from other teachers and administrators at Northern High:

I started by sending [the list of potential Enhanced Reading students] to like vice principals and counselors and then it became very messy and then it was forwarded to other people who said okay you need to contact this person and then I was getting responses from people I wasn’t really sure who they were. It was a huge headache, um, I was not trying to do this, I didn’t know how to do it, I just kind of muddled through and um. … It took some, I talked to, I got a key ally in the district who had some weight behind her name who I started cc’ing all my emails and then I started getting responses. It was a nightmare. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)
The placement and scheduling process that Mr. Taylor undertook alone that spring proceeded as follows. First, he identified students who had scored below basic or far below basic on the ELA portion of the CST in seventh grade. Then, he sent a list of those students to the counselors and teachers at the middle schools in the district in order to obtain their input about whether or not the students on the list should take the Enhanced Reading course. As Mr. Taylor notes, he did not always know which teacher, counselor, or administrator to contact about a particular student, so the process became “very messy” and “a nightmare.”

In addition to the general messiness and unwieldiness of contacting middle school personnel and obtaining referrals in a very short amount of time, Mr. Taylor highlighted two other concerns with this approach: (a) “these [CST] scores are from seventh grade because the eighth grade scores aren’t available yet until like the summer before ninth grade,” and (b) the test scores on which the student placements are based are derived from a standardized test, the CST, that students “don’t [always] take…seriously.” In light of these problems, Mr. Taylor concluded that “it’s not a great system” but “that’s what it’s been the last couple of years” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10).

The Vice Principal had a different explanation for how students would be placed into the Enhanced Reading course the following academic year. His explanation was based on the projected plan for the upcoming year:

So this year, um, we are looking at students who were identified as far below basic or below basic according to the CST scores. Um, we’re using a eighth-grade reading and writing assessment, um, that was given to students in the eighth grade and we’re also matching that up with, um, D and Fs that they received in eighth grade, um, English course. And, but then separating students who, um, have IEPS or have been identified as English learners because they already received support either through SPED or through, um, um, our EL support, um, systems here at school. So it’s really trying, not that they couldn’t benefit, but it’s really trying to give students who normally wouldn’t, or don’t have opportunities to receive any support some support so they don’t fall further behind. (Vice Principal Interview, 8-19-11)

Because the Vice Principal refers to the placement approach for the 2011-2012 school year in his explanation, it is possible that the course placement process was in the process of being streamlined to become more intentional through the use of CST scores combined with other placement criteria such as results from an eighth-grade reading and writing assessment and students’ eighth-grade English grades. Also noteworthy about the Vice Principal’s description of the updated placement process for the 2011-2012 school year is that English learners and students with IEPs would be excluded from the course because “they already received support either through SPED or through…our EL support…systems here at school.” However, given the abrupt lack of administrative support in the student placement process in the spring before the study year, it is also possible that the administration resumed their control over the placement process for other reasons. Indeed, in the next school year (2011-2012), Mr. Taylor taught three, not five, sections of Enhanced Reading due to a “lack of enrollment” (Mr. Taylor Email, 3-8-13). The year after that (2012-2013), Mr. Taylor taught just one section of Enhanced Reading. In response to my inquiries about the reasons behind this drastic reduction in
enrollment, Mr. Taylor wrote, “When I ask the administration why I’ve gone from 5 sections to 1, they say it’s because they simply can not find enough students for the course” (Mr. Taylor Email, 3-6-13). In light of these developments, it appears that support for Enhanced Reading had changed from a passive lack of support to a more active, hands-on effort to reduce student enrollment in the course over time. However, the underlying reasons behind the apparent lack of students to enroll in the course were not entirely unclear to Mr. Taylor.

**Course Effectiveness**

Mr. Taylor and the Vice Principal differed in their understandings of the existing data on the effectiveness of the Enhanced Reading course. On one hand, the Vice Principal commented that “[Mr. Taylor] actually has some very good data showing that, um, students who complete, um, who show good attendance and complete his course actually increase, um, the number of books that they read, um, and scores have gone up, so I mean it’s something to be proud of, definitely” (Vice Principal Interview, 8-19-11). Mr. Taylor does have data from his class that indicates that students who complete his course read more as a result. However, the effectiveness of the class in terms of standardized test scores, which the Vice Principal alludes to in his observation that “scores have gone up,” is less clear. Mr. Taylor had a different perspective on the question of course effectiveness. He explained:

> The most I do personally is when I see the students I just say, “Hey, what’s going on, have you read any good books?” Um, if I know they’re a senior, I ask what their plans are for next year. … It might be possible to [determine success rates] with our data system, through the district, but as far to my knowledge, I don’t think anyone has ever attempted to do that. You know it would take work to do it. … I think that would be a great thing, and something I would like to know, and ideally be able to use that to help me figure out ways and things I could do differently. But I think it would take more than just that data. … Of course it’s scary to think about that data too because I, what, if it’s good, okay great I’ll feel happy. If it’s bad, then what do I do with that? Why is it bad, what else can I do, I don’t know. Um, and part of that is administrative support, if they’re really serious about this looking closely at what’s happening and what’s not, maybe as I go on if I keep teaching this and I feel more confident I can start doing more of those things on my own. I’m not quite there yet. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

According to Mr. Taylor, during the study year there was no evidence to suggest that students’ “scores have gone up” as the Vice Principal suggests, above. Moreover, Mr. Taylor again highlights the lack of administrative support for the Enhanced Reading class when he says that he might be able start to look at some of this data on his own but, at the same time, concedes that any attempt to do this kind of analysis would require some level of administrative support, a level of support he did not believe existed at this point in time.

An analysis of student performance on the CST from 2010 to 2011 reveals that the average change in student proficiency levels for students enrolled in Enhanced
Reading during the study year was close to zero. For the 64 students who had CST information for both the spring of 2010 (the end of their eighth-grade year) and the spring of 2011 (the end of their ninth-grade year), 25% of their proficiency levels increased by an average of one level, 28% of their proficiency levels decreased by an average of one level, and 47% of their proficiency levels remained the same. These data suggest that Enhanced Reading did not have a strong positive or negative effect on students’ standardized test performance. But, as Mr. Taylor notes above, the data also call into question the basic assumption that a class like Enhanced Reading could and should raise students’ test scores and related proficiency levels. Moreover, although the Vice Principal referenced higher test scores in his discussion of the effectiveness of Enhanced Reading, there is no further indication that the administration was aware of the actual data on pre- and post-CST scores or any other outcome measures for the students in the class. If course effectiveness was not the criterion upon which the administration based their decision to reduce student enrollment in Enhanced Reading, then it is unclear what prompted them to reduce the number of students enrolled in the class from eighty students in six classes in 2010-2011, to three classes in 2011-2012, to one class in 2012-2013.

**Post-Ninth Grade**

Mr. Taylor and the Vice Principal agreed in their observations that there was very little ongoing and consistent support for students beyond the Enhanced Reading class in ninth grade. However, they characterized the supports that did exist in different ways. Mr. Taylor, for example, characterized the opportunities that were available to students after ninth grade in terms of the offerings provided by supplemental programs and specialized departments such as Special Education:

[There’s] nothing official that’s like a continuation of this class or program. There’s all kinds of tutoring and programs and stuff like that but there’s no other class. The only other like literacy support classes are in ah the Special Education department, that I know of. I don’t think ELD has anything either, but I’m not sure. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

In contrast, the Vice Principal characterized post-ninth-grade opportunities in terms of classroom-based, student-initiated supports:

At this point we haven’t, um, designed the c- the structure, um, to capture those kids who either struggled or to continue to provide, um, enrichment. Um, you know, we just, um, they choose a community that they want to be in and they go from there. Um, so at this point there’s nothing. In the sup- in whatever English class they end up in, um, or history class they end up in, there’s the support that they get from their teacher, you know, or if they choose to end up in, in some type of outreach program or, um, some other support on their own, there’s that, but is there a structured class similar to what Enhanced Reading is? No. (Vice Principal Interview, 8-19-11)

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7 According to the California Department of Education (2013), it is not possible to make direct comparisons of students’ CST scores between grades. Therefore, I discuss changes in terms of students’ proficiency levels rather than their numeric scores.
What is particularly striking about the Vice Principal’s characterization of the opportunities that are available to Enhanced Reading students after ninth grade is his emphasis on student choice. Students “choose a community that they want to be in” or “choose to end up in some type of outreach program or some other support of their own,” but, after ninth grade, there are no systematic support structures in place for students beyond the support they receive from their classroom teachers. This emphasis on student choice is similar to the way that the Vice Principal framed Mr. Taylor’s freedom as the designer and implementer of the Enhanced Reading curriculum, and it speaks to the larger administrative context of Northern High that values individual autonomy over institutional support for teachers as well as students.

The Future of Enhanced Reading

As if in response to this tension between individual autonomy and institutional support, in his vision for the future of Enhanced Reading Mr. Taylor focused first and foremost on what he would like to do to improve the course and, second, on his desire for more support in his endeavors. Mr. Taylor wanted more time with his students so that he could incorporate more writing opportunities into the reading curriculum and more resources to purchase and store the many books that were freely available to students in his classroom. Specifically:

I would like a block where we could do like more writing and have a chance to like keep up a writing journal. I’ve done that in the past and it’s been very effective, I think, but it’s just, I made a decision that, that it takes, to do it well it takes up a lot of time and it needs to be routine, and if I do that, then it misses out on something else. So I would like a longer block of time, I always want more books. Um, I would like more space to store books in a more organized way. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

After explaining his ideas for how to improve the conditions of the class itself, Mr. Taylor expressed his desire for more support for himself as well as his students. He wished for someone who actually cares what’s going on with these kids other than me. I mean I know other people care but, that’s it. They might care but they’re not doing anything. And part of me is fine with that because then no one’s in my hair usually, but on the other hand, we’re always taking about reform at this school and affecting the achievement gap, and I feel like I’m on the front lines of that right now, for better or worse, and no one ever mentions me or my class or talks to me and that’s just like, I don’t get it. I really don’t get it. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

Here, Mr. Taylor calls attention to what he sees as the implications of the lack of support for the Enhanced Reading class. He suggests that the larger school community at Northern High is only superficially interested in addressing the achievement gap and the struggles that his students face. Perhaps in reaction to this perceived lack of support from the school community, in his next reflection on how he would like to improve the Enhanced Reading class in the future, Mr. Taylor redirected his attention to the concerns of his immediate classroom community:
Another thing that’s always a doubt in my mind: Am I doing the right thing, what can I do more, what can I do better. So that question about how to adapt it, I wish I knew the answer, but that’s something I struggle with every year. I’ll start thinking about [it] soon and I’ll think about it over the summer… I’m already thinking about a couple of things I want to work on. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

Specifically, in light of concerns about his students’ ability to express themselves, Mr. Taylor spoke of his desire to work more with students on their verbal and written expression as well as their reading, with an emphasis on “using evidence always, complete answers, complete sentences” because “that’s kind of the most elemental thing for writing and arguing is you need to have support, offer support for what you say” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11).

In his description of why this is an area that he believes he needs to improve, Mr. Taylor explained that a lot of these kids don’t have [support for their opinions] and it’s almost the end of the year. It’s really frustrating when I have questions, and I say answer with complete sentences and it’s a struggle, or, “Why do you like this, give a rating for this book and give three reasons” and they can’t even do that. They say, “It’s good.” “It’s boring.” “It’s interesting.” So, that’s something I want to work on. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

Significantly, after describing his frustration about his students’ difficulties with supporting their opinions in writing and speaking, he adds that it is “something I want to work on.” In other words, his reflection on how to improve Enhanced Reading is grounded in what he saw happening in his classroom that year, and his primary focus is on how he can adapt his instruction in future years to better meet the needs of his students.

For Mr. Taylor and his students, Enhanced Reading was a class that was isolated from the rest of the school. Mr. Taylor was left on his own to create, adapt, and teach the Enhanced Reading course as he saw fit, so his vision for the future of Enhanced Reading necessarily focused on the community of his classroom, which was the only community at Northern High to which he belonged.

The Multiple Communities of Reading Workshop

In contrast to Mr. Taylor’s isolation, Ms. Cheung was involved in multiple, overlapping communities in her role as professional developer, literacy coordinator, and Reading Workshop teacher at Southern High. Ms. Cheung had a more comprehensive support network—which included other Reading Workshop teachers at both the middle and high school levels, an outside SIM consultant, and administrators who understood and supported the class—in place to support her efforts in the classroom. This larger support network meant that Ms. Cheung had less freedom to change and adapt the Reading Workshop curriculum. However, in her supplemental roles as a SIM professional developer and a literacy coach with five years of experience with the initiative, she did have some curricular flexibility, which allowed her to make modest changes to the structure of the class. The more extensive support network in the school
and the district also led to more extensive placement criteria for students as well as more attention to the effectiveness of the class and to support for students beyond the ninth-grade year.

**History and Organization**

Like Mr. Taylor, Ms. Cheung was in her sixth year of teaching the Reading Workshop course during the study year. Prior to adopting the Reading Workshop curriculum, Southern High had used a different remedial reading program, which Ms. Cheung described as an approach that “kinda fell flat on its face” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 6-2-11). She explained that it was more appropriate for elementary schools than for middle and high schools because it “gets readers caught up to like [a] fourth grade level and helps them decode, and that’s it” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10). When Southern High began looking for a new program to better serve the needs of ninth graders who were struggling with reading, the search was influenced by the decades-long relationship that one district administrator, Linda, had with the University of Kansas’ Center for Research on Learning. Therefore, with the encouragement and guidance of this administrator, the adoption of the Reading Workshop curriculum “sort of was this grassroots-y effort that basically started and kinda spread and then word caught on” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10).

Ms. Cheung was at the forefront of this “grassroots” effort. She originally became involved in the SIM training during the summer of 2005 with “about twenty teachers,” the majority of whom were trained in Content Enhancement Routines at the same time that Ms. Cheung and a few other teachers were trained in teaching the learning strategies that underpin the Reading Workshop curriculum. Thinking back on this period, she reflected:

I would argue that it’s the first time that we had a really—at least at the high school level—a comprehensive literacy curriculum for our ninth graders. Yeah, so it started with just, you know, like I would say four or five teachers and then just proliferated from there, the following year the middle schools adopted it and, um, there were hm a lot of people, I mean the training multiplied by like tenfold. We went from five people to like, you know, twenty some people in the room. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

Although Ms. Cheung remembers the implementation of Reading Workshop as a bottom-up effort, not all SIM stakeholders characterized it in this way.

The SUSD Assistant Superintendent, for example, framed the introduction of the Reading Workshop class around the larger, more comprehensive SIM initiative of which the Reading Workshop curriculum was just one small piece:

I remember Fusion coming in, ah, as part of the SIM initiative probably I want to say five or so years ago. And I remember in the beginning, you know, the, the priming of that was sort of thinking, “Oh yeah, we’ll offer it at the high school, but it will phase out at the high school level, will no longer be required, won’t be, we’ll need it at the middle school level but not at the high school level.” And that’s never really quite, um, taken. (Assistant Superintendent Interview, 5-26-11)

According to the Assistant Superintendent, Reading Workshop was just one component
of a larger initiative that spanned the middle and high schools in the district and had a long-term strategic plan in which the ninth-grade literacy class played a small and, ideally, fleeting role. However, he, too, attributed much of the success of the initiative to Linda: “[SIM] always had roots kind of in the district from, a particular, ah, ah, administrator in the district, Linda. Okay, so then she sort of was able to bring it in, train people, start it getting started” (Assistant Superintendent Interview, 5-26-11).

In contrast to Ms. Cheung and the Assistant Superintendent, however, the outside SIM consultant to the district, Susan, discussed the initial district-wide implementation of the initiative itself as a combination of top-down and bottom-up supports that were in the right places at the right time. She, too, highlighted the importance of Linda’s history with and emphatic support of the SIM initiative and argued that it was this history combined with the support of administrators, principals, and teachers that led to its district-wide implementation. She remembered:

The ten years prior to [the district-wide implementation of SIM] there was a SIM professional developer who worked in the district … She retired from the district, of the director of special education. She held many administrative positions and has been a teacher um in that particular district, so it was the, kind of seeds that were sowed those prior ten years that were really the reason that the district decided that the time, when the time was right that they had funds to really push and do something more around literacy that they chose SIM. … And so, and then, um, five years ago again there was, it was just a good combination of willingness at the district office, willingness of ah principals and teachers who made the decision, “Yes we want to do this.” And they were able to cobble together some funds, Southern’s never had any big grant to help them pay for anything and they have done an incredible job of focusing their um instruction across the district and supporting teachers and sites and principals and saying this is what we’re gonna do and we’re gonna do this in a very comprehensive, cohesive manner so we can see if something makes a difference for kids. (Susan Interview, 5-9-11)

Unlike Ms. Cheung—who speaks about Reading Workshop, in particular, and the SIM initiative, more generally, in terms of a grassroots effort on the part of a handful of teachers—and the Assistant Superintendent, who characterizes it as a top-down phenomenon, Susan views the district-wide implantation of SIM as a combination of these two extremes. All three of them, however, view Linda’s endorsement of the initiative as the one factor that was key to its successful implementation. This was because, as Ms. Cheung put it, Linda played a key insider-outsider role:

Linda wasn’t hired, she was, yeah, an outsider hired, but she was an outsider that was an insider. … So, she could go into any principal’s office and they were gonna give her some respect, you know what I mean? She could go into a room full of teachers and they were gonna give her some respect because she had clout. … She’s been pivotal. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

Linda herself began using the University of Kansas materials decades earlier when she was a special education teacher. She trained as a SIM professional developer and, later, when she became principal of an elementary school in the district, she brought the SIM approach with her to the school. During our interview she remembered that “my
elementary school staff used to say to me that I was like the dad in *My Great Big Fat Greek Wedding*, you know, anything that was Greek, he could come up with, you know any word, he could come up with a Greek derivative. Well, any problem I could come up with a SIM, you know, response” (Linda Interview, 5-13-11). Though Ms. Cheung, the Assistant Superintendent, and Susan all viewed Linda as the “seed planter” and the “roots” of SIM in the district, Linda attributed the district-wide adoption of the SIM initiative to the previous assistant superintendent who “felt very strongly on the deeply research-based interventions and what was going on at [the other high school in the district] and she could, you know, talk to those people, even talk to the students there, um, that she felt this was something that should go district wide” (Linda Interview, 5-13-11). For Linda, the support of the administration, and particularly the support of the assistant superintendent at that time, was one of the key reasons for the successful implementation of the program in the district.

**Support**

While the rhetoric at Northern High centered on Mr. Taylor as the individual and isolated implementer and teacher of the Enhanced Reading program, at Southern High discussions about Reading Workshop centered on the links between and buy-in of the different tiers of the educational system—district, school, classroom—in relation to the SIM initiative, with a focus on maintaining a commitment to the initiative at the district level. Linda, for example, still coached principals despite having recently retired from the district because she believed that the “administrative leadership is sort of the key to making everything work” (Linda Interview, 5-13-11). The Assistant Superintendent also talked about the need to merge the teacher-led piece with administrative understanding in a more cohesive, longer-term fashion that would position “secondary literacy in general as something that we say is a big part of our theory of action from a district, and sort of drive it from the district level through the schools” (Assistant Superintendent Interview, 5-26-11). He spoke of the SIM initiative itself in terms of a “distributed leadership model”:

You’ve got to have these positions on the ground, in the particular sites, who take responsibility and who have relational trust, ah, with those particular individuals at those sites. And then you’ve got to have someone at district level who can coordinate that work. Um, so for me this is about an inside-outside approach. You’ve got to have it at site based and you’ve got to have it district based. … So, we have worked to number one develop a tighter coupling of this and to create a theory of action by which you would have the district working with those distributed leaders at these different sites. (Assistant Superintendent Interview, 5-26-11)

SUSD was in the process of implementing this “inside-outside approach” in concrete ways during the study year. In addition to having a “literacy coordinator” position, which Ms. Cheung filled that year in order to foster better communication between the middle and high school Reading Workshop classes, the Assistant Superintendent was in the process of hiring someone to fill a new, full-time literacy position. This person’s task would be to facilitate communication within and between teachers in classrooms and school- and district-level administrators.
Despite these concrete steps to strengthen the links between different levels of the educational system in SUSD, none of the stakeholders with whom I spoke believed that the SIM initiative had been institutionalized in the school or the district. Though Linda noted that “the whole goal of this project has been to build Southern’s capacity” and that “they’re really ready to fly, um, with the, the capacity that has been built,” she also said, “I would not say that SIM’s been institutionalized at Southern High” (Linda Interview, 5-13-11). At the same time, however, she expressed optimism for the future of the initiative in the district, noting that it had a “district level, a site level, and an individual level of commitment” (Linda Interview, 5-13-11). Susan agreed with Linda’s perspective, observing that “they’re pretty close right now to doing this all on their own, which is, which is really exciting for them, that they have enough internal capacity to sustain the work” (Susan Interview, 5-9-11). So, too, did Ms. Cheung, who explained that “we need the support of administrators, not so much to tell us what to do but they need to understand what we’re doing” and “it feels like at this point it’s not just something that’s coming and going, it’s really, it’s sticking around” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10).

Linda, Susan, and Ms. Cheung all expressed optimism for the future of Reading Workshop, but their perspectives conflicted somewhat with the statements of others; namely, the new Principal and one of the special education teachers at Southern High. Ms. Cheung told me that she believed the new Principal at Southern High “really supports this kind of thing [referring to Reading Workshop]” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). However, the Principal herself was less direct in her endorsement of and optimism for the long-term continuation of the Reading Workshop class. When I asked the Principal what would happen to Reading Workshop the following year, when both Ms. Cheung and the other literacy teacher would be moving into new positions (one external and one internal), she responded, “We only have one section of it next year because we only, we had I think nine or ten kids, so I do see it continuing for next year, um, I’m not sure who’s gonna teach it, but I’d like to see it continue” (Principal Interview, 6-13-11). In light of comments made by Ms. Cheung and one of the counselors about the additional students who could be served by the course if there was greater capacity (see below), the Principal’s observation that “we only have one section of it next year” because there are only “nine or ten kids” hinted at the possibility of a different agenda. One of the special education teachers at Southern High commented more directly on this possibility at the end of our interview when she confided, “So right now we’re doing it this [SIM] way. I hear they want to change it. As always. Yeah, and I, for the record, I’m just not sure SIM is the one magic bullet. At all. It takes many things” (Special Education Teacher Interview, 4-12-11). The Principal’s statement that there would be one very small section of Reading Workshop rather than two the following year due to a lack of student enrollment in the class is reminiscent of the stated reasons for the reductions in Enhanced Reading offerings at Northern High. Indeed, Southern High offered one Reading Workshop class of less than ten students during each of the next two academic years.

Similar to Northern High, knowledge of and support for Reading Workshop at Southern High was variable across teachers. In this case, however, the teachers who had the most knowledge about Reading Workshop were also those who were most involved in the SIM initiative at the school. Because she taught one section of Reading Workshop alongside Ms. Cheung during the study year, the focal students’ English teacher had a comprehensive understanding of the role of the class as “support, support, support” for
students “who are in the achievement gap” and “a chance to try to make explicit what strong readers are doing,” “to help them with their own metacognition,” and “to examine their own learning” so that they can “catch up a little bit” (Ms. Zachary Interview, 4-18-11). Similarly, Walter’s biology teacher spoke about the class from her perspective as part of what the Assistant Superintendent called the “SIM leadership team” (Assistant Superintendent Interview, 5-26-11). She explained, “Our ninth grade literacy Fusion class is for our struggling learners. Um, fro- you know, giving them various strategies which they can then hopefully internalize and then use em in a generalized setting in the content area” (SH Science Teacher #4 Interview, 4-7-11). This teacher’s language is noteworthy. Unlike other teachers at the school, she speaks of “our” ninth grade literacy class, indicating a level of investment in the course that exceeds mere knowledge of its role.

Teachers who had less established connections to the SIM initiative also knew less about Reading Workshop. Lily’s math teacher, for example, indicated that she was trained in SIM’s Content Enhancement Routines but admitted, “I can’t say that I know anything about the literacy class” because the Content Enhancement Routines are “only for the sort of academic component, so I’m not sure what the extra part is that they’re doing” (SH Math Teacher #2 Interview, 4-11-11). Lily’s Biology teacher also indicated that he did not “know enough about [Reading Workshop]” and explained that he had “heard” that the role of the class was “serving the students who are having the most trouble with, um, I guess just English, reading, writing skills, um, all the way from decoding to comprehension, um. And vocabulary.” In reference to the vocabulary portion of the class, this teacher explained that “the only connections I’ve had were they asked us for some vocabulary words…some biology words…from this class to use in their classes. So, um, working on vocabulary, content vocabulary I guess, but, ah, yeah. That’s all I know” (SH Science Teacher #3 Interview, 4-8-11). This small bit of communication has both positive and negative implications. On one hand, there was some connection between Lily’s science class and Reading Workshop. On the other hand, the connection was fleeting and isolated and did not lead to more substantial communication or collaboration between teachers and courses.

The other teachers with whom I spoke at Southern High were distinctly less informed about Reading Workshop. When I asked Samantha, Tory, and Walter’s Algebra teacher about the role of Reading Workshop, for example, she said, “I have no idea. I don’t know anything about it” (SH Math Teacher #1 Interview, 4-7-11). Likewise, Tory’s Biology teacher indicated upfront, “I don’t know, so I’m taking a shot in the dark” (SH Science Teacher #2 Interview, 4-6-11). Like the history, math, and science teachers at Northern High, these teachers responded to questions about the course in ways that explicitly indicated their lack of knowledge about it.

Student Placement

The complex administrative support structure around Reading Workshop at Southern High was reflected in the articulated and multi-level student placement process. Screening for the course involved what the Reading Workshop teacher at the other high school in the district called “multiple measures” (Literacy Teacher Interview, 5-12-11) and began in sixth grade with a benchmark test from Prentice Hall that Ms. Cheung described as “very short, it’s like twenty questions, it’s a reading comp passage” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). From there, Ms. Cheung explained the process as “sort of a
flow chart...if this, then that” where students who score below a particular threshold on the benchmark test take the GRADE test, which covers “vocabulary, reading comprehension, sentence completion comprehension and then longer passage completion, passage comprehension, reading comprehension...and listening comprehension” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). Students who score poorly on the GRADE test are typically placed into a Reading Workshop class in seventh or eighth grade. In ninth grade, students also might be placed into the course based on their ELA CST test scores or a teacher’s recommendation. Ms. Cheung explained that the class particularly targets students who score in the “basic” category on the ELA CST, meaning they are “two to three years behind” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). This is in contrast to the placement criteria at Northern High, which targets students who score in the “below basic” or “far below basic” categories on the CST. Ms. Cheung clarified that the literacy teachers tend to rely most heavily on test scores because teacher recommendations and course grades are subjective: “In one class, it’s, you know, completing your homework and in another class it’s doing all this like higher-level thinking, you know, so it’s not, it’s just not, um, there’s no ah level you know like standard for grading” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11).

Despite the nuanced and seemingly comprehensive nature of the placement process, there were problems with the system. Ms. Cheung, for example, noted that the placement system “has not been systematic so there are kids that are just kind of, floating” and “should be in the class and they’re not” and “probably could swap with someone like [name of student]” who is “not in like dire need of that class” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). Similarly, the counselor at Southern High commented on the difficulty of placing students who arrive to the school in ninth grade from outside the district because there is often very little information about previous performance in school or on standardized tests. Like Ms. Cheung, the counselor observed, “I think we have probably more students than we have spaces that can really, ah, benefit from that program, from the literacy program” (Counselor Interview, 5-10-11). These observations from Ms. Cheung and the counselor are particularly noteworthy in light of the Principal’s assertion, above, that there were only “nine or ten kids” who qualified for enrollment in the course for the following year.

Like Mr. Taylor, Ms. Cheung pointed out the problem of using seventh-grade CST test scores to place students into the class. However, she added that more systematic mechanisms were in place to address potential discrepancies:

What we initially do for incoming ninth graders is we look at their seventh grade CST, their score on the GRADE, if there’s a match there, um, with these numbers, then, then we’ll place. Then we look at their eighth grade scores when they come in to make sure, okay, cuz some kids jump and then it’s like, “Well, maybe, maybe not then, maybe you know the GRADE score was just on the cusp and you know maybe he doesn’t” and then you just make those decisions. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)

While certainly not perfect, the student placement process for Reading Workshop was much more comprehensive and streamlined than the process for Enhanced Reading, and there was more support for teachers in the process. Notably, in her explanation above, Ms. Cheung uses the word “we” repeatedly to describe how she and the other literacy teachers thought about the student screening and placement process. This emphasis on the “we”
over the “I” is reflective of the larger differences in support conditions under which Ms. Cheung and Mr. Taylor operated in their respective literacy classes during the study year.

**Course Effectiveness**

Like Northern High, there were not very much existing data on the effectiveness of the Reading Workshop course; however, the district had recently hired a new Achievement and Assessment Coordinator. One of her tasks was to streamline the data collection and analysis process in order to better understand the effectiveness of Reading Workshop in terms of students’ standardized test scores and high school persistence rates. According to Susan, this new coordinator had just begun “crunching some numbers” for Reading Workshop students by looking at whether or not they were passing the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), if they were passing it on the first try, and what a comparison of pre- and post-test CST scores looked like. But she admitted that the data prior to that was “a little shaky and so it’s hard to pull data from too many years back” because of “big lost data issues” (Susan Interview, 5-9-11).

When the Assistant Superintendent introduced me to the new Achievement and Assessment Coordinator, the coordinator outlined some of the challenges of trying to determine success rates for students in Reading Workshop; namely, that Southern High does not have benchmark tests so the only way to measure change is through CST test scores. The problem, she explained, is that the students at Southern High—and particularly the Reading Workshop students—do not take these tests very seriously. She also mentioned that the CAHSEE was another way to measure success (persistence) rates for Reading Workshop students, but, again, noted that because students tend to aim to score “basic,” or passing, on this exam, it is not a reliable measure of what they are actually capable of (Field Note, 5-26-11). The Assistant Superintendent concurred, observing, “I don’t think we’ve done good research on our persistence rates for [Reading Workshop]” (Assistant Superintendent Interview, 5-26-11).

Nonetheless, Ms. Cheung claimed that she had seen twenty to thirty points of growth for some Reading Workshop students on their CST scores between eighth and ninth grade (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). Furthermore, she referenced qualitative data that she had obtained from end-of-year questionnaires that revealed students’ positive responses to the course, with many students writing about “the things that helped them and why” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11).

An analysis of student performance on the CST from 2010 to 2011 reveals that, like Enhanced Reading, the average change in student proficiency levels for students enrolled in Reading Workshop during the study year was close to zero. For the 61 students in the district who had CST information for both the spring of 2010 (the end of their eighth-grade year) and the spring of 2011 (the end of their ninth-grade year), 36% of their proficiency levels increased by an average of one level, 10% of their proficiency levels decreased by an average of one level, and 54% stayed the same. These data suggest that Reading Workshop also did not have a strong positive or negative effect on students’ standardized test performance on the CST. However, compared to the students in Enhanced Reading, a higher percentage of students in Reading Workshop (36% versus 25%) improved their proficiency levels and a lower percentage of students in Reading Workshop (10% versus 28%) saw a decrease in their levels (see Figure 3.1). This
difference may be attributed to the fact that testing strategies were built into the Reading Workshop curriculum while they were not emphasized or even considered in Mr. Taylor’s Enhanced Reading curriculum.

Figure 3.1
Changes in CST Proficiency Levels, 2010-2011

![Bar chart showing changes in CST Proficiency Levels](image)

**Post-Ninth Grade**

In contrast to Northern High where there was no specialized literacy support for students beyond ninth grade, Southern High had some existing support mechanisms for Reading Workshop students who required additional support beyond ninth grade. Moreover, during the study year, the new Principal at Southern High was in the process of creating additional support options for “at-risk” students. Although Ms. Cheung acknowledged that “it is a little sink or swim” as students transition out of Reading Workshop and into their regular tenth grade college prep English classes, she also noted that she teaches an English “bridge” class for tenth graders who still need a little bit of extra support (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). The Principal mentioned a few other support mechanisms outside the classroom that were in place for students who were not successful in Reading Workshop. Specifically, she referenced the presence of a counselor for at-risk students and the practice of pairing administrators with students about whom they are concerned. These administrators meet with students once a week to “encourage them and focus them on school” (Principal Interview, 6-13-11).

In addition, the Principal, as well as Ms. Cheung and the Assistant Superintendent, spoke about a new class that would begin the following year for students who struggled with school, in general, and not just with reading. Ms. Cheung saw this new class as another opportunity for Reading Workshop students to get specialized support beyond their ninth-grade year. In anticipation of the class, she said:
I would make the suggestion to our administration that the literacy, that we should make some kind of a flow-chart that literacy students who have not been successful, they be considered for [the new class] in the tenth grade. Um, and to see if that’s a good fit, like there should be some, maybe some bridging there. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)

Between the informal “bridge” class that Ms. Cheung taught for sophomores and the newly approved support class, combined with the other counseling and mentoring opportunities for at-risk students, Southern High had some additional support structures in place for Reading Workshop students during tenth grade and beyond. This is in contrast to Northern High, where no additional supports existed for students after they completed Enhanced Reading. At both schools, the literacy classes were positioned as interventions that would theoretically help students to catch up during ninth grade so that they would not require additional intervention or specialized support beyond the first year of high school. In practice, this ideal was not realized for every student, but only Southern High had mechanisms in place to address this reality.

The Future of Reading Workshop

Unlike Mr. Taylor’s vision for the future of Enhanced Reading, in which he focused on how he would like to adapt and improve the course curriculum within the community of the classroom, Ms. Cheung’s vision for the future of Reading Workshop focused on strengthening ties between the multiple communities that intersected and coexisted with the community of the classroom rather than on making improvements to the curriculum or strengthening the classroom community itself. At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Cheung told me that she and her colleagues had developed a “best practices” approach to the curriculum (Field Note, 9-8-10) and, during a later interview, observed, “We’re pretty happy with that as far as our curriculum that we do in the class” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). Instead, Ms. Cheung focused her vision on improvements that would strengthen the system as a whole, and particularly the links within and between the district, the middle schools, and the many classroom communities within the high school.

One of her visions for the future improvement of Reading Workshop was to implement a more comprehensive assessment system that would bridge what she called the “eighth-to-ninth-grade gap.” She explained that an “across-the-board assessment at ninth grade, for all ninth graders when they come in” would be helpful in order to avoid the inevitability of students, particularly students who were new to the district in ninth grade, “slipping through” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). This concern about students “slipping through” extended to the students who were already placed into Reading Workshop, as well. Ms. Cheung noted the general lack of support available to “at-risk” students at Southern High, even, or perhaps especially, those who were enrolled in the Reading Workshop course:

In the bigger picture, I see a lot of them falling into that “at-risk” category, and I don’t feel like my school provides for them, you know this is one class but that’s it, I mean that’s not enough. You know, there’s nothing systemic at my high school that serves these students. At all. It’s, it’s like, “Oh okay, well, they’re in the literacy class so that’s good.” It’s a, you know, so from an administrative
point of view, it’s treated in that kind of like topical way, you know, but it’s not, there’s nothing institutional going on to help our at-risk students and yet we keep hearing about it again and again, we go to staff meetings, “Oh, you know, this is our target, here’s our target group that we really need to be focusing on.” Yeah? No shit, you know, like what are we doing about it? (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

Ms. Cheung articulated one idea, in particular, that might help to address the larger problem of support for her Reading Workshop students. Her thought was to create a more systemic support system in ninth grade that might extend to other grades, as well. Specifically, Ms. Cheung expressed her wish for a “ninth-grade team” where “we have kind of like a, a mini school” that would create a “bridge to do what we call imbedded instruction” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11). This idea is very similar to the one articulated by Jack and Nicholas’ history teacher at Northern High. However, in this case, Ms. Cheung speaks of it as something that is feasible within the confines of the existing school structure, with its more tangible commitment to collaboration between teachers and administrators. At the same time, however, Ms. Cheung admitted the possible problems with creating a more tracked system and, instead, emphasized the importance of creating consistency and awareness across classes so that Reading Workshop is viewed as more than a “second English class”:

I don’t think you’d want to necessarily like track them all the way through every single class but that we ideally would get to the point where there are three or so science teachers and a couple of math teachers so there’s options of where to put them and we know like they’re, they’re on the same page. … You meet once a month or something just to touch base and then, and then you talk about a kid that’s really struggling and there’s a whole team effort behind it. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)

As part of this ninth-grade team, Ms. Cheung also envisioned that there would be a counselor whose specific job is to check in with the Reading Workshop students on a regular basis.

For Ms. Cheung, Reading Workshop was one piece of a much larger network that extended to other teachers and other schools within the district. Unlike Mr. Taylor, whose vision for the future of Enhanced Reading focused on the community of his classroom and how to adapt the curriculum to better serve his students, Ms. Cheung’s vision focused on strengthening ties between classrooms and schools.

Discussion

The different histories, organizations, and support structures involving the literacy classes at Northern High and Southern High meant that Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung privileged different communities in their roles as literacy teachers. While Mr. Taylor’s experiences led him to focus on and prioritize his classroom community, Ms. Cheung was more focused on the multiple communities with which she engaged, or hoped to engage, outside the immediate Reading Workshop classroom. These different foci led to different ways of thinking about the courses and, therefore, shaped what re-mediation looked like in the two classrooms.
At Southern High, the multiple communities of Reading Workshop meant that changes and adaptations happened as a result of interactions between teachers and administrators that existed around—but notably not within—the Reading Workshop classroom. The high level of administrative knowledge of and support for the SIM initiative, generally, and the Reading Workshop class, specifically, provided Ms. Cheung with a variety of teachers and administrators with whom she could collaborate. Moreover, Ms. Cheung had reached a level of comfort with the University of Kansas’ curriculum that did not require significant changes from year to year. This scenario brought a measure of confidence and security to Ms. Cheung’s perspective on the class as it currently existed and vision for how it might be improved in the future. However, this combination of established institutional support for Reading Workshop and a correspondingly stable curriculum meant that the students who were enrolled in Reading Workshop from year to year were not included in the many overlapping conversations that dictated what went on in the classroom. Rather, discussions about the class took place in the multiple communities that surrounded and operated independently of the day-to-day interactions between Ms. Cheung and her students.

In contrast, at Northern High, Mr. Taylor’s isolation from the other communities at the school meant that changes and adaptations to the curriculum occurred as a result of interactions between him and his students and within the Enhanced Reading classroom. The distinct lack of institutional support for the class meant more frustration and less security in terms of the mechanisms for student placement and the sustainability of the class. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, however, it meant that Mr. Taylor’s focus was on the community of the Enhanced Reading classroom itself. Therefore, the construction of the class, particularly in relation to its objectives and desired outcomes, occurred via dialogue and interaction with the students, rather than about or around them.

These findings point to the importance of an orientation toward the classroom community that takes into account the individual literacy and learning experiences of students in the context of specific classroom spaces. While institutional interest in literacy intervention classes provides critical support structures for teachers and programs, it is important that those structures do not become the main foci of adaptation and change. Ideally, teachers and students in intervention setting would benefit from comprehensive and tiered support structures while also retaining a classroom-oriented perspective on the curriculum in which curricular change is iterative and occurs through ongoing interaction between teachers and students.

Finally, despite the different conditions under which Mr. Taylor and his students operated in Enhanced Reading and Ms. Cheung and her students operated in Reading Workshop, both schools relied on CST data to some extent in order to place students into the classes, and teachers and administrators alike referenced improved CST scores as an indication of the effectiveness of the courses. However, analyses of student performance on the CST from 2010 to 2011 in both Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop indicate that students who were enrolled in either of the two classes did not necessarily improve their proficiency levels over the course of their ninth-grade year. This finding calls into question the underlying rationale of relying on CST scores to place students into literacy intervention classes and the related assumption that these classes could and should improve students’ standardized test scores. In the chapters that follow, I
complicate notions of success in the two classrooms and investigate the differing objectives and outcomes of the classes for individual students. In so doing, I challenge the underlying assumption that standardized tests are a useful way to determine the effectiveness of the two approaches to re-mediation.
CHAPTER FOUR
STUDENTS’ AND TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY AND LEARNING

In this chapter, I analyze how different students positioned themselves as readers and students in their literacy classes in ways that either aligned with or challenged their teachers’ perspectives in order to answer the second research question: How do students’ understandings of literacy and learning and their own academic identities interact with the understandings of their teachers in the context of the two literacy intervention classes?

I provide detailed analyses of four of the eight focal students—Jack and Dennis from Enhanced Reading and Samantha and Tory from Reading Workshop—who represent the extremes of the various ways that students positioned themselves in the two classrooms. Specifically, Jack and Samantha believed they needed to improve their reading abilities and positioned themselves in their classes in ways that aligned with their teachers’ perspectives. Dennis and Tory, however, already believed they were good readers, and these beliefs conflicted with their presence in a literacy intervention class. I demonstrate that success as defined by the teachers in both literacy classes was contingent upon the extent to which students’ views of themselves as readers were consistent with their teachers’ understandings of what it meant to be in the classes. I also demonstrate what happened when students’ views of themselves as readers contradicted the fact of their placement in a literacy intervention class.

Enhanced Reading: Mr. Taylor’s Perspective

Mr. Taylor accepted students into his class because he believed they struggled with reading. He attributed his students’ difficulties with reading to two main factors. On one hand, he believed that his students had difficulty with the work of reading. On the other hand, he believed that they struggled because of their negative attitudes toward reading. In his definition of what it means to be a good reader, Mr. Taylor explained these areas of difficulty in detail and noted that the students in his classes lacked many of these essential characteristics of a good reader.

[Good readers] need to know how to decode. They need to know how to read fluently, um, and all parts of fluency. Like reading with emotion, read at a certain speed. Ah, they need to have a, a basic vocabulary and a sp- specific vocabulary for what they’re reading about. Um, they need to be able to make meaning from what they’re reading. I mean that’s a big thing that encompasses all of those, but what I mean is, I definitely have kids that can do all those things that I’ve already said but then you ask them what you just read and they have no idea, they draw a blank. So they need to make the connection of, while I’m reading I have to kind of make sense of what’s going on. And think about it. Um, they need to have focus. That’s another big problem a lot of kids have. They can’t sit still and look at the words, they have to look up, they have to look around. Not just in the moment but with the book where they gotta stick with it and read it every day or else it’s hard…And then I guess the other thing is motivation to read and engagement with reading. Cuz they might have the basic tools but they for whatever reason don’t like reading or think they don’t like reading. Um, and
According to Mr. Taylor, students in Enhanced Reading are, by definition, poor readers, at least according to the criteria that he used to determine who should take the course. For Mr. Taylor, this means that they lack one or more of the characteristics that he associates with being a good reader. These characteristics include those related to the work of reading, such as decoding, fluency, vocabulary, focus, and comprehension, and those related to attitudes toward reading, including motivation and engagement.

Mr. Taylor equates success in the class with the ability to come to class on a regular basis and have an open mind about reading. In other words, to be successful in the class, students must be willing to change their attitudes toward reading. Though his definition of success in the class does not address students’ reading performance or achievement specifically, the underlying logic is that students who enjoy reading will read more and, ultimately, become better readers:

I think actually it’s pretty simple. They need to be able to come to class regularly, and they need to have an open mind towards reading. Like they need to just give things a chance. And, they need to have, they need to be brave enough to try to read um on their own and to look for things that are gonna help. But there’s not like you need any b- I mean you need to have basic decoding skills, things like that, but I have kids on all levels and I have all levels of books, so. The hardest thing is when a kid just has it so engrained that they don’t like reading and no matter what I do or what I, what books I give them, there are cases where they’re so hard to crack, or they’re just, no, they don’t like reading and they won’t read and. So, I guess that’s it, they just have to be willing to try to enjoy reading. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

Though Mr. Taylor’s definition of a good reader incorporates both the work of reading and attitude toward reading, he focuses on reading attitude over work in his description of what it means to be successful in the class: “I guess it is important that they have a certain level of actually being able to decode. And I guess even a certain level of being able to comprehend. But we’re talking about pretty basic” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10). Though most of the students in Enhanced Reading met these “basic” criteria for reading, some students—including the focal student Jack whom I discuss below—struggled with these skills, even at the most basic level. Mr. Taylor acknowledged that his class was not designed to accommodate students who struggle with basic decoding and comprehension skills, and he worried that the class did not adequately serve these students. However, he believed that all students, even students like Jack who struggled with basic decoding skills, could benefit from the opportunity to read more in a structured setting that encouraged them to view themselves as readers.

Mr. Taylor embedded this emphasis on changing students’ attitudes toward reading into his pedagogical approach. Throughout the year, and especially during the first few weeks of the semester, Mr. Taylor used his own love of reading as a way to talk with the students about the value of reading and convince them of the importance of making it a part of one’s life. On the first day of school, for example, Mr. Taylor read out loud a letter that he had written to the students in order to introduce himself and his class
to them. Before beginning to read, he handed out highlighters and referenced the
instructions on the board that asked students to (a) highlight three things that they found
interesting or that they learned from the letter and (b) write down one question that they
had for him after reading the letter. In his letter, and after a short personal narrative, Mr.
Taylor wrote:

So, you’re probably asking, “just what in the heck is Enhanced Reading?!?” Well,
I’ll tell you. ER is a class I designed to help 9th graders become better readers.
This class isn’t about learning how to read, you all already know how. It’s about
becoming a better, faster, more confident reader, one whose vocabulary flourishes
and comprehension expands. The way you will become a better reader is by guess
what … ?? That’s right- by reading.

I teach this class because I love reading and I want to share my enthusiasm with
you. I read everyday, all-the-time: At breakfast. On Bart. During lunch. On the
stationary bike. In bed. At cafes. I read because it makes me smarter and more
interesting. It’s fun. It’s relaxing. It takes my mind off my problems (and I know
that teenagers especially, can have some serious drama in their lives, right?).
Reading can even be … sexy. That’s right, I said it! (Mr. Taylor’s Introduction
Letter, 9-1-10)

As a follow up to this letter, Mr. Taylor asked the students to write letters introducing
themselves to him. On the board, Mr. Taylor included the following directions and
models for the students’ letters:

Your letter to me
1 page = A 3/4 pg = B 1/2 pg = C

Write a letter introducing yourself to me.

Things you can include:
Who are you? Where are you from? What do you like/not like? What was middle
school like for you? How do you feel about being here at NH? Why? What do I
need to know about you that would make me an effective teacher? What are your
biggest fears and hopes for the future?

Example 9/1/10 (date)

Dear Mr. T, (Greeting)

My name is _____. I am from …

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Sincerely, (closing)

David (Signature)

Embedded in these directions and models, a discussion of which directly followed Mr.
Taylor’s reading of his own letter, are explicit instructions about how to format the letter,
what questions to consider in answering the letter, and how much to write in order to receive a certain grade.

That Friday, Mr. Taylor read a poem with the students, as he would every Friday throughout the year. The poem he selected for that first Friday was Bibliophile (Atwell, 1998):

I can’t control them.
I can’t seem to intercede.
My eyes have a mind all their own.
With me or without me, they read.
They need to fix
On print at all times:
Cereal boxes at the breakfast table,
Junk magazines on the checkout line.
But mostly my eyes
Are craving good stories-
Stories about my life and times,
Found in others’ loves and worries-
Stories that take me inside myself,
Stories that take me away,
Luring me into other worlds
Where, whenever I can, I stay
And stay
Until it’s distressingly late
(Until my eyes need that other world
Where they rest and anticipate)
Fixing and fixing and fixing again
On someone’s words and ways,
Making those words belong to me, too,
Reeling in wonder and rage and dismay.
I couldn’t live if I couldn’t read.
It’s nothing less: I’m hooked.
I know it sounds like a sales pitch
(YOUR ENGLISH TEACHER LOVES BOOKS)
But your English teacher loves books.

Before reading the poem with the students, Mr. Taylor asked them to reflect on their own personal relationships with poetry. The “bell work” for the day provided the students with the following directions:

Bell Work: Poetry Quickwrite—on scratch paper, answer with complete sentences→ How would you define poetry? How do you feel about poetry? Why?

I think poetry is…
I like/don’t like poetry because…

As the students began working on the bell work assignment, Mr. Taylor told them that they would be turning in this short assignment for a grade at the end of the period. Later,
in preparation for reading the poem, Mr. Taylor discussed the name of the poem, “Bibliophile,” with the students. Specifically, he asked them what other words have “biblio” in them. Students called out various words such as “bible” and “bibliography.” Mr. Taylor responded positively to these ideas and then asked the students if there were any Spanish words that came to mind that have the root “biblio.” A student volunteered the word “biblioteca.” Then Mr. Taylor asked them about the root “phile.” When no one responded, he asked, “How about pedophile? What does that mean?” Having piqued his students’ interest with this example, they established that “pedophile” means a lover of kids and that, in turn, “bibliophile” means a lover of books. Mr. Taylor complimented them on their thinking and told them that they had just learned a new word and two new roots. From there, the class read the poem together twice, following the protocol outlined on the board:

Friday Poem: “Bibliophile” by Nancie Atwell

A. Mr. T reads aloud. Students follow along.
B. Student volunteers read aloud. Everyone else follows along.
C. ANSWER: What’s the most powerful line? Why? Why do you think I picked this poem?

After reading the poem twice, and following the protocol on the board, Mr. Taylor and the students discussed the poem’s most powerful line and why they thought he had picked this poem. Mr. Taylor also asked the students about the “purpose” and the “big idea” of the poem (Field Note, 9-3-10).

From the very first day of class, Mr. Taylor emphasized the importance of books and reading in his own life. He made it clear to his students that the main purpose of the Enhanced Reading class was to encourage them to find books that they enjoyed so that they would read more and become better readers. He stated this goal explicitly at the end of his introduction letter, writing:

In addition to the books we read together as a class, you will also read 20 books independently. Some of you will read more. Last year I had a couple students read 50 books! A bunch read thirty or forty. Starting in about a week or so, you will get a chance to read independently everyday in class and your homework will be to read at least 30 minutes more. Lucky you- you can read just about whatever you want. It can be a book from the classroom library, the school library, a public library, or from home. With all this reading, your vocabulary, speed, comprehension, and confidence will soar! (Mr. Taylor’s Introduction Letter, 9-1-10)

At the same time, however, Mr. Taylor incorporated explicit instructions and models every day throughout the year in order to provide students with the concrete steps that he believed they needed in order to become better, more habitual readers.

During the second week of class, Mr. Taylor introduced the students to the Independent Reading (IR) activities that would become a daily routine throughout the year, both in class (20 minutes) and for homework (30 or more minutes). Mr. Taylor’s grading policy reflected this emphasis on reading. As he explained to the students, “Your reading grade is half your grade in the class” (Field Note, 9-9-10).
As the name suggests, IR involved students reading books of their choice independently in class every day and for homework every night. The expectations for what Mr. Taylor wanted students to do during these times were structured and explicit. First, each student had an “Expectations for Independent Reading” sheet that they glued to page three of their class notebooks (Field Note, 9-14-10). The expectations were as follows:

1. You must read a book (graphic novels count).
2. In class, read the whole time. Read as much as you can.
3. Read at home for at least a half an hour, five days a week.
4. Don’t read a book you don’t like. If you don’t like your book, find another. Check your list of someday books. Browse our shelves. Ask me or a friend for a recommendation.
5. Find books, authors, subjects, and genres that matter to you, your life, who you are now, and who you might become. Also try new books, authors, subjects, and genres. Expand your knowledge, your experience, and your appreciation of literature.
6. It’s more than alright to reread a book you love. This is something good readers do.
7. On the student reading record (which you’ll keep in the back of your notebook), record the title of every book you finish or abandon, it’s genre and author, the date, and your rating, 1 to 10.
8. Understand that reading is thinking. Do nothing that distracts others from their reading: Be as quiet as possible. When you confer with me about your reading, use as soft a voice as I use when I talk to you: whisper.
9. Take care of our books. Sign out each book you borrow on your cards, then sign it back in with me- I’ll draw a line through the title and initial the card- when you’re ready to return it. Shelve the returned book in its section in our library, alphabetically by the author’s last name.
10. You are required to read at least 20 books this year. Additionally, you should read at least 5 different genres.

Second, Mr. Taylor provided each student with a “Student Reading Record” to glue to the inside back cover of his or her notebook. He instructed the students to add the title of each book they finished to the record, along with other information including: the number of the book completed, genre, author, date finished (or abandoned), and rating (1-5 stars). As an example, Mr. Taylor taped his own record to the wall at the front of the room (Field Note, 9-16-10) and, when I began keeping my own reading record, he asked me to tape it to the wall as another example (Field Note, 9-29-10). Mr. Taylor and I continued to update our reading records throughout the year and students often compared our lists to see who had read more. Finally, Mr. Taylor asked the students to keep a “Someday List” on the last page of their notebooks, and to include columns for the following categories: title, genre, what it’s about, wanna read? (Field Note, 9-29-10).

As a way to help his students populate those someday lists, Mr. Taylor frequently talked with students, both individually and as a class, about the book he was currently reading or had just finished. One day during the fourth week of school, for example, Mr. Taylor announced to the class that he had just finished the book Played (Davidson, 2005).
and was starting a new one. Several students asked if they could read the book he had just finished, and he told them that it would be available for checkout at 3:30 pm that day (Field Note, 9-21-10). The following week, Mr. Taylor introduced two additional books—*Push* (Sapphire, 1996) and the graphic novel *Nat Turner* (Baker, 2008)—as part of his first formal “book talk” (Field Note, 9-30-10). As the year progressed, students also participated in these book talks to gain extra credit points. Mr. Taylor encouraged the students to add these book-talk books to their someday lists.

In addition to invoking his own love of reading as a way to begin to change students’ attitudes toward reading, Mr. Taylor introduced his students to other people’s writings on the importance of reading. He used these texts to engage his students in discussions about the importance of reading. One discussion in September, the first of its kind, focused on the importance of IR, in particular. First, Mr. Taylor asked the class to go around and talk about the book each person was reading. He asked for the title, author, and a brief summary. After all of the students had discussed their books, Mr. Taylor asked, “Why do I have you reading every day?” and a student replied, “Because it’s fun.” Another student added, “For a grade.” Victoria said, “You need to read to read better. No one’s going to read for you.” And a fourth student said, “To learn new words and to expand our minds.” Then, Mr. Taylor introduced “The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research” (Krashen, 2004). He referred to the instructions on the board about how to read the text, placing particular emphasis on the directions about how to highlight:

“The Power of Reading” Stephen Krashen

Highlight: A. What F. V. R. stands for (Paragraph 1)

B. 5 benefits of F. V. R. (Paragraph 2)

*Only highlight the key word or phrase!*

Example: Another benefit of FVR is that is can be fun.

Using the highlighter that each student found on his or her desk, the students highlighted the first example (“Another benefit of FVR is that is can be fun.”) together. Then, Mr. Taylor and the students established that FVR is free voluntary reading, and Mr. Taylor pointed out that FVR is the same as independent reading in their class (Field Note, 9-23-10).

In the excerpt from “The Power of Reading,” Krashen (2004) discusses the importance of FVR and highlights some of the benefits of this type of reading:

What the research tells me is that when children or less literate adults start reading for pleasure, however, good things will happen. Their reading comprehension will improve, and they will find difficult, academic-style texts easier to read. Their writing style will improve, and they will better be able to write prose in a style that is acceptable to schools, business, and the scientific community. Their vocabulary will improve, and their spelling and control of grammar will improve.

In other words, those who do free voluntary reading have a chance. The research also tells me, however, that those who do not develop the pleasure reading habit simply don’t have a chance—they will have a very difficult time
reading and writing at a level high enough to deal with the demands of today’s world. (p. x)

During the first month of the school year, in particular, Mr. Taylor established a classroom environment in which he actively encouraged students to adopt a more positive attitude toward reading in order to (a) read more and (b) become better readers through the act of reading itself. Embedded within this larger agenda were explicit strategies for approaching different types of texts (e.g., poems, research summaries). The explicit instructions and models that Mr. Taylor provided to students as part of their reading activities in September were a consistent component of his instruction throughout the school year.

Though students’ difficulties with the work of reading varied, Mr. Taylor believed that all students in the class needed to develop more positive attitudes toward reading in order to become better readers: “Really in this class I’m about just trying to change habits and attitudes” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10). The explicit instructions and models like the ones described above served to meet students at their current level, whatever that level might be, and guide them through the process of reading. Therefore, a student who identified as a poor reader but was willing to change that identity through their work in the class met the most important criterion for success envisioned by Mr. Taylor. A student who did not come to the class with a deficit view of himself as a reader, however, faced a contradiction between his placement in the class—and all that implies—and his identity as a reader.

**Enhanced Reading: Student Perspectives**

Three of the four focal students in Enhanced Reading—Jack, Nicholas, and Victoria—had developed deficit views of themselves as readers over time that were consistent with Mr. Taylor’s profile for Enhanced Reading students in terms of both the work of reading and attitude toward reading at the time they enrolled in the class. However, the fourth focal student, Dennis, struggled with and at times challenged the view of himself as a poor reader that was imposed on him through his placement in the class. In this section, I focus on two students, Jack and Dennis, to demonstrate the different ways that students’ beliefs about themselves as readers interacted with Mr. Taylor’s perspective on what it means to be successful in Enhanced Reading.

**Jack**

Jack came to Enhanced Reading with a deficit view of himself as a reader that had developed over time through his experiences with reading in school. During the fall semester of his ninth-grade year at Northern High, in interviews and in class, Jack consistently identified himself as a poor reader in terms of reading mechanics but expressed his desire to become a better reader. Although Mr. Taylor worried that Jack’s reading skills were too low to allow him to benefit fully from the class, Jack did not make this distinction between his own reading abilities and those of the other students in the class. Rather, he viewed the class as an opportunity that was directly in line with his goals of becoming a better reader. During our first interview, I began by asking Jack about the last thing he had read that he enjoyed reading. He responded, “I don’t read that much. I don’t read that many books” (Jack Interview, 1-6-11). Jack’s identity as a poor reader has a history that he traced back to his family’s move from Palestine to California when he
was in third grade. In our interview he explained:

When I was in Palestine, when I used to go to school, I used to read, my mom used to help me do my homework and stuff. I used to read, [but then] when I came, when I first came here [around age seven], I don’t know how to speak English or nothing...And then like I went to like the third grade, I finished second grade over there, I came here to finish third and then like they held me back, they held me back to um kindergarten, no first grade and like I’m, I’m behind. Like, I’m supposed to be in, in the eleventh but I’m in ninth and I got held back to first. Um, [name of teacher], a black lady, she helped me how to like read and stuff. And that was nice of her. (Jack Interview, 1-6-11)

In Palestine, Jack remembers that he “used to read” in Arabic with his mother’s help. When his family moved to California, however, Jack was held back from third grade to first grade and his teacher helped him learn to read in English, which required that he learn a new alphabet in addition to a new language. However, despite his teacher’s help, Jack’s worst memories of reading are “reading like in, in front of a class” and “like in front of like people that know how to read, that’s tough” (Jack Interview 1-6-11). Jack’s identity as someone who is “behind” in school is tied to his identity as someone who dislikes reading in front of other people. In making this distinction between himself and the other students in his classes who “know how to read,” Jack positions himself as a poor reader, at least in the context of American education.

Though Jack did not believe he was a good reader, he saw a direct connection between becoming a better reader and his ability to achieve his goals and, perhaps most importantly, make his father proud. During our first interview, he explained:

I, I don’t like reading that much but my dad’s telling me like when I, you gotta learn to read like because you, because you want to be a doctor and stuff, they’ve got like paper, you’ve got to read it, like, oh, you just, you gotta stop and you don’t know how to read it, like, that would be like hard for you. (Jack Interview, 1-6-11)

Similarly, in the introduction letter he completed for Mr. Taylor at the beginning of the year, Jack introduced himself as a poor reader but expressed his desire to become a better reader. He wrote:

Dear, Mr. Taylor,

my name is Jack and I came to your class to Read I am not a good Reader but I want you to help me to read vrey good just why I am staying in your class to larend to read good. I am a soccer player and I am a very good Player. And my dad own a hat store in [name of town] at [name of street] it is good you should come buy there if you want. I what to read good but it hard for me to read just why I am not a good read.

Think you
Jack

In this letter, which Jack wrote during one of his first days in class in response to Mr. Taylor’s introduction letter, Jack explicitly identifies himself as a poor reader, in contrast
with being a good soccer player. At the same time, however, he indicates his interest in becoming a better reader. Jack’s positive attitude toward reading, or, in Mr. Taylor’s words, his “open mind towards reading,” therefore aligned with Mr. Taylor’s definition of a successful student in Enhanced Reading.

However, Mr. Taylor worried that Jack’s basic reading skills, particularly his word recognition and oral reading skills, were too low to allow him to benefit fully from the class. Mr. Taylor also worried about Jack’s writing skills, noting in our interview that “his writing really needs help,” but he believed that the “very structured writing assignments” would be helpful to Jack and that the opportunity to read more would improve both his reading and writing abilities, including his spelling, vocabulary, and grammar skills.

Jack joined the sixth period Enhanced Reading class on September 3rd, the third day of school, after his academic support teacher advocated for him to be in the class. During our interview, this teacher explained that she decided to ask Mr. Taylor if Jack could be in Enhanced Reading because “the problem with, with Jack is that it seems like his needs are both, you know, decoding and fluency” and “we want students to be in the least restrictive environment possible.” Like Mr. Taylor, she too expressed doubts about the decision to place Jack in the Enhanced Reading class as opposed to one of the literacy classes that are “just for students with IEPs” and that are “specifically focused on decoding” and noted, “I’m a little uncertain whether it was necessarily the right fit, um, but he seems to be thriving in the class so and enjoying it” (NH Special Education Teacher #1 Interview, 4-19-11).

Though Jack’s academic support teacher placed him in Enhanced Reading for the specific purpose of building his fluency, on that first day Mr. Taylor told me that Jack needed to practice his fluency and wondered out loud if the class was the correct place for him. Later on, in our first interview, Mr. Taylor expanded on his concerns:

I think Jack gets benefit from this class, but I think he needs kind of a different instruction, too. And I don’t, I can’t, or at least don’t know how to really give him in the, in this setting...So I think he’s still getting a lot out of the class but it’s not giving him everything he needs and definitely once he gets out of this, it’s not like his academic problems are gonna be solved...His big things are you know kinda some basic um oral reading and word recognition that I don’t know if this is the ideal class for cuz this, he struggles so much. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

From Mr. Taylor’s perspective, Jack’s difficulties with the work of reading, particularly his word recognition and oral reading skills, were so severe that they nearly precluded him from benefitting from the class. Mr. Taylor tried to address these difficulties by asking seniors who volunteered in the class from time to time to read out loud with Jack during independent reading time (Field Note, 9-30-10). Though Jack still had difficulty reading out loud at the end of the semester, he became more strategic about what he read. For example, where possible he began signing up for shorter reading parts ahead of time, after previewing them to see how long they were and to identify any words he did not know. Ultimately, Jack’s beliefs about reading and what it means to be a good reader were sufficiently compatible with Mr. Taylor’s beliefs for him to be successful.

Jack and Mr. Taylor’s beliefs were compatible because they both privileged
reading attitude over reading mechanics. According to Jack, being a good reader means trying hard and asking for help. In our first interview he explained that good readers “don’t quit on it…ask for help if you don’t know what the word is or stuff” (Jack Interview, 1-6-11). In this description, Jack references his word recognition skills, one of the aspects of reading about which Mr. Taylor was most concerned. In his efforts to be a good reader, or someone who doesn't quit and asks for help, therefore, Jack met Mr. Taylor’s key criterion for success in the class, a willingness “to try to enjoy reading.”

Jack followed his own advice on how to be a good reader throughout the first semester, thus enacting in addition to articulating Mr. Taylor’s key criterion for success. He consistently arrived to class early and settled into his reading quickly. Though other students’ conversations and provocations regularly distracted him, Jack responded to Mr. Taylor’s attempts to redirect him, and for the most part he read diligently for the twenty or more minutes of independent reading that occurred regularly at the beginning of the period. Jack also maintained a high level of participation in class, despite the fact that it sometimes exposed him to his classmates’ ridicule. In December, for example, Jack signed up to read the part of Laurel in the group-reading text, This is What I Did (Ellis, 2007), which involved reading aloud a series of extended passages. Though some of the students in the class grew visibly restless and aggravated by Jack’s slow and halting reading, he did not give up reading his assigned passages and appeared unconcerned by his classmates’ attitudes. Mr. Taylor commented on Jack’s perseverance at the end of the class period, noting that he had a few very long passages but that he stuck with it (Field Note, 12-16-10). Therefore, although Jack’s reading skills were low for the class, his articulated and enacted commitment to becoming a better reader resonated with Mr. Taylor’s beliefs.

Despite Mr. Taylor’s misgivings about Jack’s placement in the class, his awareness of Jack’s effort and his support and encouragement of Jack’s successes were constant throughout the semester. In our first interview, Mr. Taylor observed:

But really what I want to do is keep his engagement up cuz it’s still pretty high despite severe challenges. He still reads out loud, he still attempts it, and he’s still pretty focused during independent reading. Now I don’t know, I have a hard time knowing, what, is he, how well is he reading silently. Um, but I think it’s just a positive thing that he has books in his hand every day that are opened and he seems to be interested in them. So, I want to keep going on that and push that. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

Mr. Taylor encouraged Jack in both public and private ways. In his first-quarter evaluation, for example, Jack wrote that his goal for the second quarter was to “read more big book. 150 pgs,” and, when Jack achieved this goal by reading The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (Alexie, 2007), which is over 200 pages long, Mr. Taylor publicly commended Jack on his accomplishment (Field Note, 12-8-10). Jack also indicated in his first-semester evaluation that he felt that there was a lot of improvement in his reading and that he was “proud of reading a long book.” Mr. Taylor validated Jack’s efforts in the class in a note at the end of the evaluation, part of which read: “You worked really hard to improve your reading this semester: you read 19 books (!) and your reading aloud sounds much smoother and more confident! Keep up the great work.” Although Mr. Taylor worried that Jack’s word recognition and oral reading skills were
too low for the class, Jack regularly demonstrated his commitment to becoming a better reader through active participation and engagement in the class, which was Mr. Taylor’s key criterion for success.

**Dennis**

Although three of the four focal students’ identities as readers aligned with Mr. Taylor’s understanding of what it meant to be in Enhanced Reading, one focal student, Dennis, struggled with and, at times, challenged the identity implications of being in the class. During the fall semester of his ninth-grade year at Northern High, Dennis viewed himself as someone who enjoys reading, as long, he qualified, as it’s “something I can relate to.” This qualification suggests that for Dennis the ability to choose what he reads is an important part of his identity as a reader. As he explained during our interview, “One thing about reading, you do have options” (Dennis Interview, 12-14-10). Dennis’ placement in Enhanced Reading, however, contradicted his view of himself as a reader and as an agent of his own learning since he did not choose to be in the class. He negotiated these contradictions by emphasizing his own agency as a reader and as a student in the literacy class.

Dennis’ identity as a reader was due at least in part to his prior successes with reading; however, he interprets these early experiences in a way that is at odds with Mr. Taylor’s interpretation. Dennis’ favorite memory of reading was “getting awards and stuff, like, just getting like awards in my class for reading. Like, the most, you know, like the most, the most books read in a year and stuff like that in…third grade” (Dennis Interview, 12-14-10). Mr. Taylor’s speculations about Dennis’ early experiences with reading mirrored Dennis’ own reflections:

He’s got some skills but they’re, you can tell they’re a little rusty too. At one time he was probably a good reader, like in higher reading groups if they had such, but he probably didn’t read for some years, much at all, so he’s still kinda there. But he, he also knows what’s going on cuz [uc] his comprehension when he’s reading independently and as a class. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

Though Mr. Taylor acknowledges that the mechanics of reading are in place for Dennis, he also reveals his belief that Dennis is no longer a good reader because of his apparent lack of engagement with reading in recent years. Therefore, Mr. Taylor believes that Dennis needs to reengage with reading in order to be a good reader again. Dennis, however, sees himself as someone who was and still is a good reader.

For Dennis, being a good reader means having agency and a deep knowledge of self. It requires finding something “that you’re comfortable reading, not something that you dislike or something that somebody tell you to read. You see if it’s, what’s best for you” (Dennis Interview, 12-14-10). Dennis, therefore, sees his progression from someone who won awards in third grade for “the most books read in a year and stuff like that” to someone who is more discerning about his reading choices as evidence of his growth as a reader. In his reflection on how he’s changed as a reader since he was younger, he clarified this perspective on his reading when he observed, “I’m more sm- smart about my reading. I’m not reading anything anybody tells me to. I’m reading something that, that makes me comfortable and that I’m confident that I can read and I try to strive for longer books every time” (Dennis Interview, 12-14-10). For Dennis, therefore, reading
became an opportunity to exercise agency; it was no longer something he did to win an award or because somebody told him to do it. Dennis’ definition of a good reader as someone with agency, and his belief that he was a good reader according to this definition, was at odds with Mr. Taylor’s framing of the course around the belief that students in Enhanced Reading need to improve their reading skills, and, more importantly, change their attitudes toward reading.

Dennis came into Mr. Taylor's class with a clear belief that he was a good reader. However, the very act of his placement in the class challenged that belief. Thus, the only way that Dennis could maintain his identity as a good reader was to challenge the basis of the placement. The contradiction between Dennis’ identity as a good reader and his placement in the class influenced his attitude toward the class in a variety of ways. For example, Dennis’ participation in and engagement with the literacy class waned over the course of the fall semester. Like Jack, he joined the Enhanced Reading class on September 3rd, the third day of school. In the beginning, he regularly arrived late to class. Although this tardiness was due in part to the fact that he was on crutches for a football-related injury to his leg and took longer to navigate the halls between passing periods, he continued to disengage over the course of the semester. Of the 36 classes I observed during the fall semester after he joined the class, Dennis was ten or more minutes late to six of them and absent for 14 of them. Some, but certainly not all, of these absences were excused due to doctor’s appointments related to his leg injury. When I met Dennis’ grandmother at the end of November in order to gain her permission to work with Dennis, she mentioned that she was concerned that Dennis had missed so much school due to his leg injury and related surgeries. This was a concern shared by Mr. Taylor who made the following observation during our interview earlier that month:

Okay, so now Dennis has kind of just gone AWOL…I don’t know if that’s related to the shooting, I don’t know, it could be…Dennis has been gone this whole week. He maybe showed up one day, I don’t know…And then even before that it was, I think it was kinda getting spotty a little, so I don’t know what’s going on with him. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

The shooting to which Mr. Taylor referred occurred the previous Saturday, when a ninth grade football player who attended Northern High was shot by his friend, an upperclassman at the school. The boy died later that week and many students in Mr. Taylor’s class were deeply affected by the loss. By the beginning of December, Dennis continued to miss class frequently, prompting Mr. Taylor to observe on a Tuesday in early December that he had not seen Dennis since the previous week (Field Note, 12-7-10). Over the course of the first semester, Dennis often chose whether or not to attend class; as the semester progressed, his absences accumulated as he increasingly chose to opt out of the class.

When Dennis was in class, he regularly communicated his superior reading abilities to the rest of the students in both positive and negative ways. For example, he corrected his peers as they read out loud. On his third day in the class, Dennis corrected another student when she mispronounced the words “furious” and “shuddered” (Field Note, 9-7-10). A week later, another student stopped at the word “aromas” while reading aloud from The Gun (Langan, 2002) and Dennis jumped in and pronounced it for her (Field Note, 9-14-10). A month later, however, Dennis’ participation took on a more
negative tone. When a student said “closet” instead of “clothes” while she read aloud, Dennis laughed loudly and for an uncomfortably long time. Later, Jack read “never” instead of “ever” and Dennis again laughed out loud (Field Note, 10-19-10). Dennis made his perspective on his position in the class very clear in October. When another student asked Mr. Taylor how students get placed in the Enhanced Reading class, Dennis explained that he was only in the class because he could not be in P.E. due to a football-related injury that affected his knee (Field Note, 10-14-10). While this explanation may have been true in part, according to Mr. Taylor it was not the only reason why Dennis was in the class. When he was present, Dennis actively positioned himself as a superior reader who, unlike the other students in Enhanced Reading, was in the class by default rather than by necessity.

As the semester progressed, Dennis increasingly positioned himself in opposition to the norms of the Enhanced Reading classroom. During class at the end of September, for example, Dennis aggressively told Mr. Taylor to stop harassing him. He repeated this several times. At the end of class, Mr. Taylor spoke with Dennis about what happened and explained that Dennis made him feel disrespected as a teacher. Dennis told Mr. Taylor that he does not like people checking up on him because it makes him feel dumb. Mr. Taylor assured Dennis that he does not think he is dumb and promised to back off a little bit in the future (Field Note, 9-29-10). On days when he was present, Dennis often forgot to bring his backpack (and hence his independent reading book) to class, and he seemed to go out of his way to distract other students from their reading (e.g., by asking provocative questions, bouncing tennis balls, flipping coins, texting) and indicate his disinterest in the class (e.g., sitting with his head on his desk, not reading along with the class). On one occasion after a series of absences, Dennis interrupted the class as they were reading the group text *This is What I Did* (Ellis, 2007) to ask, “What are you all reading?” before picking up his own copy of the book. Later, as the class discussed a few of the reoccurring images that appeared in the book, Dennis asked, “Why you all talking about donuts and pickles?” (Field Note, 11-30-10). Through comments like these, Dennis positioned himself as a disinterested member of the class.

At the same time that Dennis communicated his lack of interest, even derision, for the class, he also remained concerned about his performance. In September, Mr. Taylor praised three students in the class who had already finished an independent reading book and had an A+ for reading. Dennis asked about his book that’s “like 300 pages.” He wondered how many pages he needed to read to have an A. Mr. Taylor told him that having read 80 pages as of that day, so 100 pages by the next day, would get him an A (Field Note, 9-14-10). Later that week, Dennis asked Mr. Taylor how to get his tardies removed. Mr. Taylor told him that he would not mark him tardy as long as he arrived to class within five minutes of the bell (Field Note, 9-17-10). The following Tuesday, Dennis arrived just three minutes after the bell rang, a marked improvement from his typical arrival time of ten or more minutes after the bell (Field Note, 9-21-10). Dennis’ conflicting attitudes toward Enhanced Reading make sense in light of his identity as a good reader, which he defines as having agency. On one hand, Dennis maintained his position as a good reader in relation to the other students in the class. On the other hand, he challenged the class in ways that communicated to Mr. Taylor, the other students, and himself that he had the ability to choose when and how he participated in class.
One class session, in particular, exemplifies what happened when Dennis chose to engage in class and, in so doing, showcase his reading abilities. On this particular day, Mr. Taylor told the class that they would be working on vocabulary and asked, “What do you do if you come across a word you don’t know?” Dennis responded that you look at the words around it, and Mr. Taylor validated his response, saying, “Yes, you use context clues. That’s what we’re going to practice this year.” As part of the vocabulary exercise, Mr. Taylor asked students to draw pictures to represent each word. For example, one student drew a half mutant, half person to represent the word “dehumanizing.” Dennis volunteered his own drawing for “dehumanizing,” a picture of a large person, then a smaller person, and then a smaller person and explained that they keep getting smaller “to leftovers.” Mr. Taylor observed that Dennis was drawing “symbolically.” Later, as the class began to read from the group-reading text, *Life in Prison* (Williams, 1998), Mr. Taylor asked, “What two words does he use for ‘doo doo’?” and Dennis responded, “Feces and human waste.” When they reached the end of the chapter, Mr. Taylor asked the students to “raise your hand if you have an idea how he stopped himself from going stir crazy,” and Dennis responded that he kept himself “productive” (Field Note, 10-28-10). Dennis remained engaged throughout this class period, perhaps due to the fact that the topic—life in prison—was particularly relevant and interesting to him. But what is most noteworthy about this example is what it reveals about Dennis’ ability to engage deeply with a text when it is a text that he believes is relevant to him and, therefore, worth his while.

In December, Dennis volunteered to do a book talk and provided another glimpse of what happened when he chose to engage with a text and in the class. Dennis’ decision to talk about his independent reading book, *Confessions of a Serial Kisser* (Van Draanen, 2008), was precipitated by two factors. First, as previously noted, book talks were an opportunity for extra credit, which was something Dennis needed to offset his poor attendance and lackluster reading record. Second, Mr. Taylor had made a deal with Dennis: every time another student read *Confessions of a Serial Kisser*, Mr. Taylor promised to pay Dennis an undisclosed amount of money in compensation for donating the book to the class library. In addition to demonstrating what it looked like when Dennis engaged with a text and in class, his book talk also highlights his interest in books that he can relate to in some way. During the book talk, Dennis stood at the front of the room and described his book:

This book called *Confessions of a Serial Kisser*. I don’t know, I just, I just bought this book, I thought it was going to be interesting. I don’t know, it’s just about this girl trying to figure out who she is, going to high school, just kissing all the other boys cuz she read a lot of books, cuz she read a lot of books talking about love and stuff and she just trying to figure out who she is and the whole book is just trying to find out who she is in high school. (Audio recording, 12-16-10)

When another student in the class asked, “Why do you think people should read it?” Dennis replied, “Man I don’t know, I don’t know, I just, it’s interesting like, like I can relate to it, like I’m in high school, I don’t know…she was just trying to figure out who she is. So, it was just an interesting book” (Audio recording, 12-16-10). During this book talk, Dennis communicated three particularly important points. The first point is that he bought the book himself, rather than checking it out from the class or school library. The
second point is that he was interested in the main character of the novel because she tries to negotiate her own identity through the books she reads and the actions she takes in her own life. The third point is that the main character does these things in order to “figure out who she is” in high school in a way that Dennis can relate to. Though not a high school girl, and presumably not a serial kisser, Dennis appreciated this book—and related to it—for how it portrays a fellow high school student’s struggle to carve out an identity for herself at a complicated time.

Mr. Taylor recognized Dennis’ struggle to figure out who he was during his first semester in high school. He hoped that the opportunity to read in the context of the Enhanced Reading class would provide him with a way to see himself as a student, as well as a reader. However, Mr. Taylor did not consider, or at least did not comment on, the potentially negative consequences of Dennis’ placement in a class for poor readers when he did not view himself in this way. In our first interview, Mr. Taylor reflected:

I hope this class helps him engage or reengage with school. If he is here, he’s definitely picked up his reading. I think part of it’s a pride thing. He saw, he looked around and saw all these kids were reading all these books and he was just kind of slowly getting through a book, but he started finishing books, um, so if he’s here for a whole year I think he’ll read a lot of books and so he’ll improve on all those things: vocabulary, spelling, confidence, it will be habit forming…I think he needs the class. Cuz I don’t think he would be doing any of this reading otherwise, and that goes for the English class, I don’t know if he, if he reads his English books that are assigned for homework and I don’t know how much reading they’re doing in class. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 11-5-10)

For Dennis, being a reader and being a student both involved making choices. Mr. Taylor recognized the choice that Dennis faced during the first semester of his ninth-grade year and hoped that the Enhanced Reading class would help him choose to engage with reading and, ultimately, stay in school. However, Mr. Taylor did not consider the possibility that Dennis’ placement in the class, with its associate identity implications, might itself contribute to his disengagement with school. In January, Dennis brought a firearm to school, just before the end of the first semester. He was removed immediately from the school, and Mr. Taylor did not have the opportunity to find out whether or not the Enhanced Reading class would help him reengage with school in the ways that he envisioned.

Dennis’ identity as a good reader (i.e., a reader with agency) did not align with Mr. Taylor’s framing of the Enhanced Reading class because, as a good reader, Dennis did not view himself as someone who needed to change his orientation toward reading. In this way, Dennis’ view of himself as a reader challenged Mr. Taylor’s perspective on the students who enrolled in the Enhanced Reading class.

**Reading Workshop: Ms. Cheung’s Perspective**

In contrast to Mr. Taylor, who emphasized the work of reading and reading attitude in his definition of what it means to be a good reader, Ms. Cheung articulated her definition of what it means to be a good reader in terms of the strategies that good readers subconsciously employ when they are faced with a difficult text. In her description of a good reader, Ms. Cheung emphasized the ability to approach a text in the right way by
using appropriate strategies such as connecting and adapting to the text at hand, making predictions, and asking questions. She highlighted each of these strategies separately in her description of what a good reader does:

I think those connections are huge. If you have a hook into what you’re reading, it is going to stick with you, especially something that you don’t necessarily like and you struggle with, if you can have something that connects you with that reading, even if to someone else that connection makes no sense at all, if it’s gonna make it stick, that’s huge.

[Good readers] are able to adapt, so I guess that’s another thing, you can adapt from one type of text to another text. I can pick up you know this and read from this [local newspaper], but then I can also pick up a history textbook and figure out how to, um, maneuver the text. I think that’s, that’s something that good readers know how to do, they can, they’re flexible.

Good readers are active readers so they’re making predictions, they’re asking questions in their head, um, they’re storing away those, those, um, main ideas and details to make later connections, to draw you know bigger points across a text. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

For Ms. Cheung, good reading is about actively engaging with the text through the use of strategies such as making connections and adapting to the text, making predictions, and asking questions.

Ms. Cheung viewed her Reading Workshop class as an opportunity for students to learn the strategies that will make them good readers, or, in her definition of the term, strategic readers who do more than simply decode a text:

Obviously at the most basic level they need to know well okay, so they need to know how to read, how to read, like okay literally yes they need to be able to decode but then, like, we really break that question down in the literacy class, how to read. Well, what do you do when you read? Like, you, you think about, you know, so that’s when we break it down into these steps, like how do you approach a text, do you, maybe you scan through for some clue words, like if you’re dealing with a novel you do, I call it like a book walk, go through, you use CLUE, you look at the title, the author, the genre, you gather any information there that you can before you get started, make a connection, make a prediction, move on. And that you don’t, you, a, a good reader is always stopping and thinking about it. The thing is that strong readers do that very quickly, it’s not so explicit. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

In her explanation of the central question of Reading Workshop—how to read?—Ms. Cheung emphasizes learning how to use strategies to approach a text in an active way. Implicit in her description is the assumption that the students in Reading Workshop are not active (i.e., strong) readers and, therefore, require explicit instruction in these types of strategies in order to become better readers. Indeed, she goes on to note that “most of [the students in Reading Workshop] are there because they are not strong readers so um it’s okay if they’re struggling. That’s, that’s understandable. It’s expected” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10). Working from this assumption, Ms. Cheung defines success in the
class not as the ability to read well, but as the ability to understand and enact both the norms of the classroom and the expectations of the class:

I guess they need to know what I expect from them, that’s what they need to know. They need to know the norms in the room and um and they need to know what’s, what they can expect to get out of this class, that’s what they need to know. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

Like Mr. Taylor, Ms. Cheung was explicit about her expectations for the course, and this was especially true in the first month of the school year. In the case of Reading Workshop, however, the main emphasis of the class during those first few weeks was on strategies. On the first day of class, Ms. Cheung handed out a short survey that asked students to rate their level of familiarity with four different reading strategies: CLUE, Bridging (PART/FIND), Summarization (PPS), and PASS the test. The survey also asked students if they took a literacy class in middle school and, if so, who their teacher was (Field Note, 8-30-10).

On the second day of class, Ms. Cheung asked students to work in groups of two or three to answer the question, ‘What is a strategy?’ After writing their definitions of a strategy on strips of construction paper, each group shared their answers with the rest of the class. Ms. Cheung compiled these pieces of construction paper onto a single poster that she hung on the wall at the front of the room. It included the following definitions:

**What is a Strategy?**

A strategy is a plan that you compose to use in a situation.

A strategy is a thinking method that solves problems.

A strategy is a plan to do something; Andy—strategy is also something that involves your brain; ex. chess, puzzles, checkers.

A type of plan; a type of technique.

A specific way to do something.

A strategy is a plan (to reach your goals).

A strategy is a way to solve problems or get through something; a strategy is a type of technique.

A strategy is a way to do some type of challenge.

A plan or a way to approach something while learning.

A plan or a way to approach something.

Ms. Cheung concluded the “What is a strategy?” activity with the observation that “having strategies is important. In this class you’re going to learn how to be strategic learners and thinkers” (Field Note, 8-31-10).

Ms. Cheung also reviewed three strategies with the students in the first month of school: (a) a prediction strategy called CLUE (Check for clues, Link to prior knowledge, Uncover predictions, Examine the reading); (b) a fluency and decoding strategy called PART (parting words based on beginnings [prefixes], endings [suffixes], and words that you know to pronounce [decode] the word), and (c) a paraphrasing and summarization
strategy. Her assumption was that these were the strategies that many of her students had learned in their middle school literacy classes; however, it was not always apparent how many of the students in the class were familiar with the strategies prior to that year.

During the second week of school, Ms. Cheung filled out a Reading Workshop course organizer and course map. She explained their importance by noting that they include information about “what I expect you to learn in here” and stressed that the class is about “being a strategic student, having a plan and getting where you need to go” (Field Note, 9-7-10). As a class, the students filled out the course organizer to read:

This course (Advanced Reading Workshop) is about becoming a strategic student by mastering learning strategies and integrating them into the reading in my classes and other texts.

Course Questions:
1. What is generalization? Why is it important?
2. What is integration? Why is it important?
3. What is a strategy? What does it mean to be a strategic learner?
4. How do predicting (CLUE), fluency and decoding (PART), summarizing (TSS), and inferencing (INFER) help to make me a better reader and learner?

Later that week, the class completed the course map, as well (Field Note, 9-10-10). It included the following information related to the goals of the class:

Learning Routines
- Warm Ups
- Learning Strategies (CLUE, PART, …)
- SIR
- Thinking Reading (whole class reading)
- Fluency Drills
- Vocabulary (from IP + Sci)
- Progress Monitoring

Critical Concepts (strategic learning, integration, generalization)
- Review of Strategies
- Summarizing + Paraphrasing
- Inference
- I-Search
- Thinking Reading

Expectations, particularly related to the goal of becoming strategic readers and learners, play an important role in Ms. Cheung’s definition of success. But, like Mr. Taylor’s understanding of success, her definition does not address students’ reading performance or achievement specifically. The underlying logic for Ms. Cheung is that students who understand what she expects from them in terms of knowledge and behavior and are willing to learn and use the strategies that she teaches them will be more strategic, and ultimately better, readers.
Reading Workshop: Student Perspectives

Three out of the four focal students in Reading Workshop—Lily, Samantha, and Walter—had views of themselves as readers that aligned with Ms. Cheung’s understanding of her students as struggling readers who required explicit instruction to become more strategic readers. At the same time, these three students adopted model student behaviors in the class that aligned with Ms. Cheung’s perspective on how to be successful in the class. The fourth focal student, Tory, had a view of herself as a reader that did not align with Ms. Cheung’s understanding of her students as struggling readers. Ultimately, however, Ms. Cheung viewed Tory as someone who should not be in Reading Workshop and helped her to transition out of the class. In doing so, she validated Tory’s view of herself as a good reader. In this section, I focus on two of the focal students, Samantha and Tory, in order to demonstrate the different ways that their views of themselves as readers and students were sufficiently consistent with Ms. Cheung’s view, a combination that allowed both of them to be successful, albeit in very different ways.

Samantha

During the first semester of her ninth-grade year at Southern High, Samantha viewed herself as someone who enjoys reading, but she did not believe that she was a particularly good reader. Like Dennis, Samantha explained that her enjoyment of reading is contingent on whether or not the text is interesting to her. She particularly enjoys murder and mystery stories like the Pretty Little Liars series (Shepard, 2006) because these books move fast and she likes “not knowing what’s happening next” (Samantha Interview, 10-20-10). In her introduction letter to her English teacher, Ms. Zachary, Samantha articulated her attitude toward reading in a similar way, writing, “I love reading if I have a book I really enjoy. One vacation this summer, I easily read 6 books [in the Pretty Little Liars series] in 5 days” (Samantha’s Introduction Letter, no date). For Samantha, reading a good book is a mind and body experience. When she read the Pretty Little Liars books, for example, she explained, “I usually read it on the ground in a corner cuz like, if I like, I don’t know, if I read it in my bed, I’m worried that something will like come up - hm - from the bottom of the bed” (Samantha Interview, 10-20-10). Samantha identifies as someone who enjoys reading under the right circumstances; however, for her, reading enjoyment does not imply reading prowess.

Though Samantha said she enjoys reading under the right circumstances, she does not believe that she is a good reader. In our first interview, Samantha explained that she thinks others (i.e., her parents) view her as just an average reader:

They [her parents] would probably say I’m like average, I read you know average, I guess...I like reading, if I have something I like to read...usually I don’t really like announce to the whole family I’m gonna go read, that’s why they don’t really know what I’m, I don’t know, doing upstairs. (Samantha Interview, 10-20-10)

Samantha reflected on the history of her parents’ view of her reading abilities when she explained that one of her worst memories of reading involves fighting with her mother about it. She described “my mom yelling at me cuz when I was younger I didn’t really like to read cuz I don’t think I found out about like murder books back then, so I didn’t read. Didn’t like to read, so she’d yell at me to read more. Then I’d cry, we’d get in a big
fight” (Samantha Interview, 10-20-10). Her parents’ view of Samantha as an average reader is a perception that Samantha holds of herself. In her introduction letter to Ms. Zachary, she wrote:

I think I need to improve my reading comprehension skills. During my vision test that I took a few weeks ago, the test results showed that I’m in between a 10th and 11th grade level, but I feel strongly like I still need lots of improvement. I also took a reading quiz and it said that I read at a 12th grade level. (Samantha’s Introduction Letter, no date)

The test and quiz to which Samantha refers in her letter were part of an independent assessment that her parents initiated to determine whether Samantha had any specific learning difficulties or disabilities. The assessment included teacher consultations, and several of Samantha’s teachers expressed surprise that her parents were concerned about her. Regardless of the origin of the assessment, Samantha’s perspective on the results of the vision test and reading quiz are informative. On one hand, Samantha acknowledges that she had scored well on these tests by placing well above the ninth-grade level. On the other hand, she downplays this information, noting that she feels “strongly” that she needs “lots of improvement.”

However, there is a contradiction in Samantha’s assessment of herself as a reader and her view of what it means to be a good reader. In our interview she explained that good readers “have a book they like”—in her case, a murder or mystery book, “have an area they like to read, like by a window is really, you know, peaceful, I think,” and “read a lot.” Though Samantha meets these three criteria—she enjoys reading the Pretty Little Liars series (Shepard, 2006), she has a place she likes to read (in a corner of her room, on the floor), and she reads a lot if it’s something she enjoys reading—Samantha still believes that she needs to improve her reading. Therefore, although Samantha identifies herself as someone who enjoys reading—a key criterion of her definition of a good reader—at the same time she seems to have internalized her parents’ view of herself as an average reader in need of improvement.

Though Samantha’s view of herself as a reader is complicated by others’ perceptions of her abilities, she is much more confident in her ability to be a successful student. Samantha’s positive memories of reading in school focus less on reading and more on the schooled procedures and rewards of completing reading tasks correctly. In second grade, for example, Samantha remembered an assignment she enjoyed where “we had to highlight words that we didn’t know in a newspaper and then we had to highlight in a different color words that we did know, and we had to like sound that words that were highlighted in the color we didn’t know. Um, so, we had to make a list and put them on flashcards” (Samantha Interview, 10-20-10). She recalled another positive memory of reading in elementary school where “you had to read like an amount and then you got stars and then, um, and then when you filled, um, a certain amount of stars you got to go to [name of store] and get an ice cream cone” (Samantha Interview, 10-20-10). These memories are reflective of Samantha’s favorite parts about school, specifically, completing her work thoroughly, on time, and in an organized fashion. In her introduction letter she explained, “I’m the kind of student who always gets their homework done, no matter how long they have to stay up. It’s very rare when I don’t try my hardest. I’m very organized and every item in my backpack, locker, and bedroom has
its very own place” (Samantha’s Introduction Letter, no date). For Samantha, organization and hard work are key factors in her ability to be successful in school.

The characteristics that Samantha identified in her letter are ones that Ms. Cheung also noticed and appreciated on several occasions during the fall semester. During our first interview, for example, Ms. Cheung observed that

Samantha is a strong student, and she has really great, like, organization skills, and I think for her it’s really just like fine tuning things. It’s, she, it’s a really like take it or leave it, she doesn’t probably have to be in there as much as some of the other students…strong, very quiet and under the radar but actually her work is, is, is good for the most part. And I think it’s really just refining and truthfully it could be a, she could, she probably would be okay without it. Yeah, yeah. She would survive. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 10-19-10)

Ms. Cheung considered Reading Workshop to be an opportunity for Samantha to fine tune her skills. In fact, she went so far as to observe that Samantha “probably would be okay without [the class].” In December, Ms. Cheung again mentioned her appreciation of Samantha’s organization skills when she observed that her Reading Workshop binder was very organized as compared to other students’ binders, many of which had half-finished papers everywhere with doodling all over them (Field Note, 12-14-10). These observations reflect Ms. Cheung’s key criterion for success in Reading Workshop: that students understand and enact the norms and expectations of the class.

In keeping with Ms. Cheung’s observations about Samantha during out first interview, Samantha tended to keep to herself during the fall semester of Reading Workshop and usually remained quiet and unobtrusive. She rarely volunteered to speak unless she was called upon, in which case she always provided answers to Ms. Cheung’s questions. During class breaks, she most often remained quiet at her desk, and she often chose to work alone. In early November, for example, Ms. Cheung asked the students to get into pairs in order to do a “think pair share” based on the day’s warm-up assignment, which was a main idea, details, and prediction activity based on the group-reading text, Copper Sun (Draper, 2006). Samantha did not pair up with another student and told Ms. Cheung as much when asked who her partner was (Field Note, 11-2-10). When Ms. Cheung changed the seating chart in October and put Samantha at the front of the room (Field Note, 10-19-10), Samantha remained in this seat for a few days before quietly returning to her original seat at the back of the room. Ms. Cheung commented on this switch a week later while passing back graded worksheets to the students, but she did not ask Samantha to return to her assigned seat (Field Note, 10-26-10). Despite this subtle act of defiance, Samantha maintained an outwardly compliant persona in class. She listened to directions, completed her work, and followed along when Ms. Cheung read aloud.

Samantha positioned herself as a diligent student in Reading Workshop who did not cause distractions in class and always completed her work. By maintaining an organized and compliant persona, she exemplified Ms. Cheung’s understanding of what it meant to be successful in the class (i.e., the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the norms and expectations of the class). Because Samantha’s identity as a reader was complicated by her internalization of others’ beliefs about her reading abilities, and because Reading Workshop was a class in which she could showcase her model student
habits, her placement in the class aligned with Ms. Cheung’s ideas of what it meant to be successful in the class. Ironically, although Ms. Cheung noted that Samantha “doesn’t probably have to be in there as much as some of the other students” and “truthfully…she probably would be okay without it…she would survive,” the fact of her placement in the class reinforced Samantha’s view of herself as an average reader in need of improvement. Samantha could be successful in Reading Workshop even as someone who saw herself, at least in some ways, as a good reader because the class privileged and validated her work ethic, while at the same time addressing her desire to improve her reading comprehension skills.

**Tory**

During her first semester of high school, Tory viewed herself as someone who loves—and is an expert on—reading. In her introduction letter, Tory described herself as “a reading machine” and noted that she had “read over 30 different books over the course of 2 years” (Tory’s Introduction Letter, 8-30-10). At the beginning of the school year, when she presented her personal museum to the class, she identified herself as a writer as well as a reader by sharing thirty chapters of the fantasy/mystery book that she had begun writing the year before. She also shared the book *Wait Till Helen Comes* (Hahn, 1986), which she told the class she’d read ten times (Field Note, 9-1-10). Tory sees herself as a more accomplished reader now that when she was in elementary school:

> When I was younger, even when I was in like elementary school, I would do very easy read stuff that like anybody could read. But, now that I’ve gone to middle school and high school I’ve really changed the type of reading that I’ve done. I’ve read adult novels and I’ve expanded my vocabulary, so it’s kind of um, changes a lot. From going to very simple, simple easy read things to very complex books. (Tory Interview, 12-1-10)

Unlike Samantha, therefore, Tory viewed herself as a very good reader who did not need to improve her reading skills through the use of reading strategies. At the same time, Tory was also very concerned with being perceived as a good student in addition to a good reader. Therefore, her ultimate success in transferring out the class validated her own view of herself as a good reader and a good student who did not belong in the class in the first place.

Tory’s memories of reading are consistent with her identity as a good reader. During her personal museum presentation, Tory explained that she “used to love to read when I was little” and described how she would dress up as the girl from *The Big Comfy Couch* when she wanted to read (Field Note, 9-1-10). In our first interview, Tory expanded on her adoption of this reading persona as a child:

> I used to wear these big blue glasses that um I got from a TV show. I would wear these big huge glasses and I would get out a book and sit on the couch and start reading, so, I guess it was just ah when I was very young I started reading...the TV show that I used to watch was The Big Comfy Couch and the girl in there would only wear the glasses when she was reading and she would only sit on her couch with her, with like her pillows and her blankets and read, so, I, I just picked it up from there...My mom thought it was the weirdest thing because whenever I wanted to read, she never watched the show with me, and she was telling me that:
“It was the weirdest thing because whenever you would read, I’d say, ‘Go,’ I’d say, ‘Tory, go get a book’ and then you would bring your glasses back instead of the book.” And she, she thought it was the weirdest thing in the world that I used to wear those glasses. (Tory Interview, 12-1-10)

From an early age, Tory remembered identifying as a reader, and even dressing for the part, and this was an identity that she communicated to her teacher and peers in Reading Workshop from the very beginning of the fall semester.

At the time of our first interview, Tory believed that being a good reader is contingent on what a person likes to read and how much a person reads. It is also related to being “smart” and “educated.” When I asked Tory what a person needs to know or be able to do to be a good reader, she explained:

I guess [how to be a good reader] depends on what kind of genre they like because if they like complex genres then they have to have a wide variety of vocabulary, but if they like easy read then it’s sort of like whatever, like, suits you, whatever you like the best. So I think it’s mostly just depends on what kind of genre they like, cuz everybody likes different genres. (Tory Interview, 12-1-10)

Tory’s definition of what it meant to be a good reader changed depending on the specific person and his or her reading preferences. At the same time, Tory believed that good readers read a lot. For example, she thought her mom was a good reader “because of, the thou- like the hun- not even thousands, hundreds probably, hundreds books that she has in her closet, in boxes, that she’s read and she’s still mentioning how she needs to read these couple more books” (Tory Interview, 12-1-10). Similarly, her believed her aforementioned friend is a good reader because

her closet is filled with a whole entire, like probably, say this, this is her closet, she probably has four or five shelves of different books lined up like alphabetical order. She has, she has so many books and she’s, she’s read all of them and she reads them over and over and over again cuz they’re just her favorite books in the whole entire world and she loves them so much. (Tory Interview, 12-1-10)

But reading a lot, in Tory’s view, was also an indicator of a person’s education and intelligence. She explained that her mother has “always loved English” and is “just really smart and she gets, she gets it” (Tory Interview, 12-1-10). She also believed her aforementioned friend’s status as a good reader went hand in hand with her intelligence: “And she’s also, as I mentioned with my mom, very educated, so. She’s very smart...She’s a, in a lot of the advanced classes here” (Tory Interview, 12-1-10).

According to Tory, then, good readers are smart and well educated, enjoy reading, and, consequently, read frequently.

Tory’s identity as someone who reads well and loves reading conflicted with her placement in the Reading Workshop class. Therefore, from the very first day of class, Tory actively represented herself as someone who read too well for the class. She did this in several ways: by contributing to class discussions in ways that demonstrated her strategic reading prowess and by aligning herself with another student in the class, Donna, who also felt that she was inappropriately placed in the class. On the third day of class, after Tory’s personal museum presentation in which she represented herself as an
avid reader and writer to her classmates and after Ms. Cheung explained that they would be reading *The Gun* (Langan, 2002) together in class, Tory commented that she already read *The Gun* in summer school several years ago (Field Note, 9-1-10). Over the next few days and weeks, Tory often answered questions in ways that demonstrated her knowledge of reading and of the class content. When another student in the class incorrectly answered Ms. Cheung’s question, “What is a prediction?” for example, Tory jumped in with the correct answer (Field Note, 9-3-10). The next week, when Ms. Cheung asked the class for explanations of what it means to be a strategic learner, Tory raised her hand and said, “It means you’re one step ahead. You have a plan for what you want to do as you go along” (Field Note, 9-8-10). And the following day, when Ms. Cheung asked what the PART strategy does, Tory volunteered that it’s to “split [the word] up” (Field Note, 9-9-10) and, later, refined her definition by explaining that PART is something you use to “break down words” (Field Note, 9-13-10). When given the opportunity, Tory also volunteered to read from the group-reading book, *The Gun*, and regularly answered Ms. Cheung’s questions about what was happening in the story. By participating regularly in Reading Workshop in ways that demonstrated her superior reading ability, Tory positioned herself as a good reader with knowledge of strategies while also enacting her understanding of the norms and expectations of the class.

At the same time that Tory established herself as a knowledgeable reader, strategist, and participant in the class, she also aligned herself with Donna in order to communicate her disinterest and boredom to Donna as well as her other classmates. On numerous occasions, for example, Tory turned to Donna to make a comment or ask a question, such as how much time was left in the period, which communicated her frustration. When Donna spoke with Ms. Cheung about switching out of the class, she commented that she had learned some of these strategies “in like third grade” and that she would rather be in drama (Field Note, 9-9-10). Tory followed Donna’s lead about a month later, in October, when she also petitioned Ms. Cheung to switch out of the class. Ms. Cheung revealed to me at this point that Tory and Donna were in the class for the wrong reasons, which she noted happens sometimes (Field Note, 10-12-10). By opting out of the class and, perhaps more importantly, successfully recruiting Ms. Cheung to agree that her placement in the class was a mistake, Tory challenged the deficit view of herself as a reader that was imposed on her through this placement.

Ultimately, Tory’s view of herself as a good reader and student aligned with Ms. Cheung’s perspective because, by allowing Tory to switch out of the class, Ms. Cheung distinguished Tory as different from the other students in Reading Workshop.

**Discussion**

On the surface, Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop served similar types of readers. However, Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung adopted very different instructional approaches in their literacy classes, which reveal their assumptions about the underlying cause(s) of their students’ struggles with reading. On one hand, Mr. Taylor believed that the reason for his students’ difficulties was due to their lack of good reading habits and inability or reluctance to see themselves as readers. Therefore, from the very first day of class, he placed a strong emphasis on the importance and benefits of reading while also embedding explicit instructions and models into the reading activities in order to guide students through the reading process. On the other hand, Ms. Cheung believed that the
reason for her students’ struggles was due to their unfamiliarity with the reading strategies that she understood as key to being a good reader. Therefore, she emphasized the importance of mastering these strategies as the overarching goal of the class. Mr. Taylor’s and Ms. Cheung’s different understandings of their students’ difficulties led to different definitions of success in their classes and goals for their students. However, both teachers believed that if their students could adopt a positive attitude toward the class—that is, a willingness to change their attitude toward reading in Enhanced Reading and an openness to learning and using reading strategies in Reading Workshop—they would be successful in the class and, ultimately, become better readers.

Mr. Taylor’s and Ms. Cheung’s beliefs interacted with the beliefs of their students in different ways, depending on the extent to which their students’ identities as readers and perspectives on the class aligned with the teachers’ perspectives. On one hand, Jack and Samantha were successful in their respective classes because their understandings of their own reading difficulties sufficiently matched their teachers’ definitions of what it meant to be enrolled in the class and because they had positive attitudes toward their respective courses. However, both Jack and Samantha may have benefitted from some of the opportunities provided by the other intervention model. Jack wanted to be a better reader and read 19 books in the first semester and a total of 28 books over the school year. For this reason, he met the key criterion for success in the class. However, he continued to struggle with his word recognition and oral reading skills, and Mr. Taylor believed that it was outside the scope of the Enhanced Reading class to address these struggles adequately. Depending on the structure of the group-reading activity, Jack sometimes had the opportunity to vet the reading ahead of time and ask Mr. Taylor questions about the pronunciation or meaning of the words in his assigned section of text. Therefore, it is possible that some explicit attention to reading strategies—decoding strategies, in particular—would have assisted Jack in these areas. Samantha also wanted to be a better reader. The main reason for her success in Reading Workshop was her model student behavior and work ethic, both of which aligned with Ms. Cheung’s stated norms for the class. Just as Jack might have benefitted from additional targeted strategy instruction in the areas of word recognition and oral reading, the opportunity to read more high-interest texts in the context of Reading Workshop might have been an opportunity for Samantha to build her confidence and, in turn, begin to see herself as more than simply an “average” reader.

On the other hand, Dennis and Tory’s identities as good readers conflicted with the fact of their placements in literacy intervention courses, but they negotiated these conflicts in very different ways. Tory willingly adopted the norms of the class as a way to convince Ms. Cheung that she did not need to be in the class while simultaneously challenging the placement in her interactions with her peers. Ultimately, she convinced Ms. Cheung that she surpassed the criteria for success in the class to such an extent that Ms. Cheung agreed to let her switch out of the class. In this case, switching out of the class was a viable option for a student like Tory who could demonstrate mastery of the strategies that were at the heart of the course. In other words, if a student had already mastered the strategies that good readers use, then there was no reason to keep that student in a class that focused on those strategies.
In contrast, Dennis seemed to be internally conflicted as a result of his placement in Enhanced Reading. On some days, Dennis engaged with the class and with the reading in positive and productive ways. On other days, he went out of his way to demonstrate his superior reading abilities, on one hand, and his boredom with the class, on the other. There are several ways to interpret Dennis’ behavior. Dennis might have adopted this conflicted approach to the class out of a refusal to accept the identity of a poor reader implicit in his enrollment in the class. Alternatively, he might have positioned himself in this way to mask his insecurities about his placement in the class. In a third interpretation, Dennis might have assumed the role of the class antagonist for reasons that extended beyond the fact of his placement in the class. Whatever the reason(s), Dennis’ inconsistent interactions with Mr. Taylor, his peers, and reading itself during the first semester of Enhanced Reading negatively impacted his ability to succeed in the class in the way that Mr. Taylor envisioned for his students. At the same time, switching out of the class was not as viable of an option in Enhanced Reading as it was in Reading Workshop because, in Mr. Taylor’s mind, anyone could benefit from additional opportunities to read and engage more deeply with books.

Dennis’ experience in the Enhanced Reading class highlights one of the negative consequences of a class that is geared specifically toward students who are presumed to struggle with reading. His experience also reveals assumptions about why a student is in the class and what they might gain from it. Mr. Taylor framed his class around the assumption that all of the students in the class needed to change their attitudes toward reading in order to become better readers, but this framing did not align with the reading skills or the perspective on reading that Dennis brought to the class. Therefore, rather than building upon Dennis’ existing identity as a good reader, the fact of his placement in the class came into conflict with his preexisting identity. Dennis’ lack of success in Enhanced Reading is particularly striking when juxtaposed with Jack’s successes. Dennis came to the class with better reading skills and a much more positive and confident sense of himself as a reader, but Jack could be more successful in the class because its framing aligned with his own perceptions of himself as a reader.

By revealing the very different beliefs that underlie two teachers’ perspectives on their literacy intervention classes and the corresponding instructional approaches that they draw upon in the classroom, these findings demonstrate how success and failure are constructed in the classroom. These findings also demonstrate the importance of attending to students’ identities as readers and learners, particularly when those identities are incompatible with the contexts in which they find themselves.
CHAPTER FIVE
STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON RE-MEDIATION

In this chapter, I investigate how students understood their experiences in the two literacy intervention classes in order to answer the third research question: How do students’ understandings of the literacy and learning objectives and outcomes of their literacy classes interact with their emerging identities as readers and students?

I begin with an overview of the focal students’ understandings of the objectives of their literacy classes and identify key differences between the ways that students in Enhanced Reading and students in Reading Workshop viewed their respective classes. Specifically, I demonstrate that the focal students in Enhanced Reading had a shared understanding of the objective of the class, and that this understanding was related to the students’ increased self-awareness and identities as readers and students. In contrast, I discuss the different understandings that the focal students in Reading Workshop had about the objectives of the class and the connections between these different understandings and students’ perceptions of themselves as readers. I focus on two of the eight focal students—Victoria from Enhanced Reading and Lily from Reading Workshop—as examples of students whose understandings of course objectives aligned most closely with the understandings of their teachers and then trace the outcomes of the classes for these two students in order to illuminate the ways in which the two classes re-mediated students’ reading in different ways.

Literacy Objectives Across Focal Students

In the third of our series of three interviews, I asked the focal students in Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop to tell me, first, how they thought they had changed as readers over the course of their ninth-grade year and, later, what was the most useful thing they had learned in their literacy classes. The students in Enhanced Reading answered these questions in ways that communicated their common understanding of the course objectives. This common understanding was one that they also shared with Mr. Taylor. Specifically, the students believed that they had improved as readers and, in some cases, writers during their ninth-grade year as a direct result of their experience in the Enhanced Reading class, and that these improvements had positive implications for their work in other classes. In contrast, the students in Reading Workshop answered my questions in ways that revealed two distinct understandings of the course objectives. These understandings reflected Ms. Cheung’s two main goals for the course (i.e., to improve students’ reading in their high school content-area classes and to improve students’ performance on standardized tests). However, unlike the students in Enhanced Reading who spoke explicitly about how the course helped them to improve their reading, the students in Reading Workshop did not make a clear connection between the coursework and how they had changed as readers over the year. Rather, the students in Reading Workshop viewed the objective of the class as an opportunity to develop a strategy toolkit from which they might choose what strategies to adopt to assist them in their work in other classes and on tests.
Enhanced Reading: Reading as Emotional and Intellectual Experience

The Enhanced Reading students shared an understanding of the objectives of the class with Mr. Taylor and each other that transformed reading from a necessary chore to an emotional and intellectual experience, which in turn had implications for students’ self-awareness and identities as readers and students. For Mr. Taylor, the Enhanced Reading class offers an opportunity for students to engage with reading in a way that has the potential to transform their view of themselves as readers. He believes that this transformation has implications for students that extend to their other high school classes as well as to their lives beyond high school. From his perspective, there are two levels of implications, one related to academics and one related to life beyond school. Mr. Taylor explained the school-level implications in this way:

I would say [the role of the Enhanced Reading class] is to um really give the students a chance, um, with their academic classes. Since they’re two to several years below grade level, their literacy skills, it’s giving them like a real big push to get their skills up to the point where they can compete, where they have a chance. Um, so, a big part of that is just confidence and engagement, so it’s just giving them a chance to see that they like reading and give, have the time and space to explore their own, um, reading habits. To develop that reading habit hopefully also so that they will continue to read after this class is over. It’s just trying to, I mean it’s really trying to transform the way they look at reading and the way they see themselves as a reader to where that they think they’re a reader and they actually have the habits of a reader. So to hopefully, cuz that’s the only way they’re gonna really strengthen their literacy, not just in here in this class but continuing on as the years go… When they’re assigned a book in their English class, they won’t just give up before they even try it, they’re used to reading books, they’re used to finishing books, both independently and as a class. So, that they do it in their English class and their assigned reading for history, et cetera. Um, also of course like it’s get better vocabulary, get better reading comprehension, reading fluency, all those things. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

One of the goals of the class is to build students’ skills and confidence as readers so that they are prepared to tackle the reading tasks assigned to them in their other content-area classes. In addition to this goal, Mr. Taylor also emphasized that the objectives of the class extend beyond school, to students’ future lives as readers:

And I guess in the bigger picture that they will become readers in their life, not just to be able to succeed in high school and go to college but that I think it’s a good thing to do as a person, as a human being. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

Mr. Taylor achieved this second objective in class by requiring that every student independently read twenty books or more in at least five different genres over the course of the year with the understanding that, for many students, it’s a year-long process. At the heart of his approach is the objective that students “develop as independent readers and be habitual readers and daily readers” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11) so that reading is a part of their lives in school and beyond.
The three focal students in Enhanced Reading understood the objectives of the class in ways that mirrored Mr. Taylor’s perspective. In particular, all three of them pointed to the amount of reading that they did as the most useful aspect of the class:

_The most useful thing learned in Enhanced Reading was…_

Jack

Reading a lot of books…I spent a lot of time reading like, over, like I’ve never read that many books in my life cuz I don’t like reading. (Jack Interview, 6-1-11)

The part of this class that most helped me become a better reader was 29 books that I readed. Another thing was reading to my teacher because it was great. (Jack’s End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11)

Nicholas

I think reading a lot of books was very helpful because, before I didn’t have reading and I used to like read one book every maybe like two or three books every year. But now I read like twenty books, twenty or something books…I think [reading a lot] just increases my reading level and helped me be more educated. (Nicholas Interview, 5-31-11)

This year I read more than fifty books. For me this is a lot of books because I don’t usually read. I think I read more this year because I found alot of intresting and uniq books. (Nicholas’ End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11)

Victoria

Reading. And, just reading. Cuz, I mean, there’s really nothing much to say, but like reading’s just, you just have to sit down and read because if you don’t do it for yourself then really you’re not gonna get no where, you’re just gonna stay the same. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

I read 13 books this year. This time I read more than what I read. I think I read more because most of the time I just read 6 books. The genres I read were plays, urban drama, novel in verse and poems. (Victoria’s End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11)

All three focal students emphasized the amount of reading that they did in the class in their discussion of what was most helpful to them. While the number of books they read over the course of the year varied widely (Jack read 29 books, Nicholas read 50 books, and Victoria read 13 books), all three students reported that this number far exceeded the number of books that they had read over an academic year in the past. Moreover, all three of the focal students in Enhanced Reading connected this accomplishment to their increased confidence as readers in and out of school. Though Jack reported at the end of the year that he still “[struggles with] reading... Because ah um it was harder to me to understand and stuff” (Jack Interview, 6-1-11), in his end-of-year letter to Mr. Taylor he reflected on how he had changed as a reader in positive ways. He wrote, “I grew a lot as a reader this year because I can read better now…This year I larned that I can read, it fun to read” (Jack’s End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11). For Jack, reading so many books was evidence not only that he could read, but also that reading could be an enjoyable experience.
Like Jack, Nicholas reported that he still struggles with reading, but he also noted the ways in which reading had become an important part of his life in school as well as outside of school. Specifically, Nicholas explained that he still struggles with vocabulary:

Like, ah, when there’s like a paper you have to read and there’s like a lot of complicated words and stuff. Then when you read it it doesn’t make any sense. And then like everyone’s like doing it but then I, like you’re stuck, and you don’t know what to do, so... We had a project and there are like all these facts that we had to like write down. There were like so many facts and they were like really complicated and there were like really big words that I didn’t understand. (Nicholas Interview, 5-31-11)

Despite these ongoing struggles, however, Nicholas also reported that reading had helped him to improve his grammar, spelling, and reading and that it had become an important part of his relationship with his younger sister. He addressed these benefits of reading in both our interview and his end-of-year letter to Mr. Taylor:

I think I read more now that, like I read to my [ten-year-old] sister, ah, like when she, before she goes to bed. And yeah. And I, and like I, now I’m at a higher reading level and there’s like more interesting books now. (Nicholas Interview, 5-31-11)

I grew allot as a reader this year because I read alot and I also read to my sister. my grammer and spelling also got better because of my reading. Reading everyday befor class helped me become a better reader because not only did I get to read at home I also got to read at school. Next year I’m hoping to read MokingJay and alot more books. (Nicholas’ End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11)

For Nicholas, Enhanced Reading was a place for him to practice his reading, but the benefits of his experiences in the class extended to his life outside of school as well.

Finally, Victoria acknowledged the ongoing realities of herself as a reader, but, like Jack and Nicholas, reflected on the ways that reading in the Enhanced Reading class had helped her to become a better reader and writer. In her end-of-year letter to Mr. Taylor, Victoria wrote, “Yes I did get better at my reading this year” but, later, continued with the observation that “I consiter my self a slow reader” and then, “This class has helped me a lot because it has helped me grown as a reader” (Victoria’s End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11). In our interview, she expanded on the specific ways that she had changed as a reader:

I’ve changed because, over, b- the words just got. I’ve changed um because I started reading more at home than I used to and my reading got more fluent and it started, it’s starting more smoother, and I started um picturing the things I was reading in my head. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

Reading for Victoria became something that she did at home, which led her to believe that her reading fluency and ability to comprehend and internalize what she reads had improved. She also made a connection between reading and writing, explaining, “I think [writing] comes with the reading. I think so. It’s just, you know, the more that I read the more I became more fluent as well with my writing. So, I think reading and writing are, are, they come together” (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11).
Reading Workshop: Reading as a Strategy Toolkit

The Reading Workshop students did not share an understanding of the objectives of the class with each other in the way that the students in Enhanced Reading did. While two of the focal students, Samantha and Walter, focused on the importance of the test-taking strategies that they learned in the class, the other focal student, Lily, discussed the objectives of the class in terms of the INFER and generalization strategies that she learned. These different understandings are likely due to the fact that instruction in this class focused on providing students with a set of discrete strategies—a strategy toolkit—to use across classes and testing situations, with particular emphasis on how to use them in other classes (generalization) and in testing situations. Therefore, the focal students varied in what they took away from the class and, ultimately, viewed the class in different ways.

For Ms. Cheung, the role of Reading Workshop is to provide students with a strategy toolkit that they can access in order to (a) read better in all their classes in high school and (b) perform better on the state standardized tests:

The goal of the class is to prepare ninth graders who are behind in their literacy skills for um tenth grade and ideally to get em caught up in their ninth grade um core or, you know, um you know hard disciplines: math, English, science, etc. Um, to shore up any, any deficits um that they may have in terms of literacy skills um and then ideally by tenth grade they’re, they’re um I wouldn’t say like- okay there’s the ideal versus what really is. I mean what can you do in a year? You, so you’re, the bigger picture is you’re hoping that by the time they go on to tenth grade, at least in terms of having a set of reading strategies and tools, um, that they can access they will know that they have access to these tools and strategies and if they, when they confront a difficult text or um or a difficult assignment, they’re gonna have ways of tackling it… In addition, um, we want them to do better on their state standardized tests. I wouldn’t say that this is um the main initiative behind it, but it’s part of it and we have seen historically growth, so um typically somewhere between twenty and thirty points growth um on the CST or the STAR test. So, I would say those are the bigger picture items. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)

According to Ms. Cheung, the objectives of the class are, first, to provide students with strategies that will allow them to access the academic curriculum in ninth grade and beyond and, second, to improve standardized test scores. Ms. Cheung discussed one strategy, in particular, that is essential to the objectives of the class:

I think the primary, number one goal of that class is generalization and integration. That they understand the application of the strategies to other work. Reading, tests, ac- you know projects, anything that’s gonna involve literacy strategies. That is the bigger picture. And if, and if that’s all they walk away with, that’s all I want, you know what I mean. Um, that is, that is absolutely the bigger picture. Period. I hope that they’re getting [the concept of generalization] cuz that’s the way strategic people think when they’re doing something they just start, you know, masterminding it in here [points to her head]. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)
Over the course of the year, the students in Reading Workshop learned seven main strategies:

- A fluency and decoding strategy called PART (parting words based on beginnings [prefixes], endings [suffixes], and words that you know to pronounce [decode] the word);
- A prediction strategy called CLUE (Check for clues, Link to prior knowledge, Uncover predictions, Examine the reading);
- A paraphrasing and summarization strategy;
- An inference strategy called INFER (Interact with the questions and the passage, Note what you know, Find the clues, Explore any Supporting Details, Return to the question);
- An action plan/goal setting strategy;
- A test-taking strategy called PASS (Prepare to succeed, Analyze the directions, Summarize each question, Survey the test); and
- A generalization strategy

Ms. Cheung introduced each of these strategies to her students by explaining that these were the types of activities in which good readers engaged when they approached a text. Ms. Cheung placed particular emphasis on the generalization strategy because it was a way to remind and encourage students to use the strategies they learned in class to comprehend their work in other classes, or, in other words, to integrate and generalize those strategies to their literacy practices beyond the Reading Workshop classroom. In addition to having time in class to practice the generalization strategy as it applied to work for other classes, the students also completed an end-of-year I-Search project. Ms. Cheung saw this project as another opportunity for them to apply the strategies that they had learned in a different context. While Ms. Cheung and Mr. Taylor share an overarching objective—to facilitate their students’ access to the academic curriculum across content areas—they emphasize different aspects of reading. On one hand, Ms. Cheung focuses on literacy as a toolkit of strategic practices that students may draw on as necessary when they confront difficult texts in school or on tests. On the other hand, Mr. Taylor focuses on literacy as an emotional and intellectual experience that students participate in as part of being literate both in school and outside of school.

Because Ms. Cheung emphasized the toolkit nature of the literacy strategies that the students learn in her class, it makes sense that students grasped on to different strategies depending on their perceived needs as readers and students. For Samantha and Walter, for example, the PASS strategy was most helpful:

*The most useful thing learned in Reading Workshop was...*

Samantha

Probably the test strategies… Like um Ms. Cheung told us, you know, use letter of the day, like if you have to guess, use the same exact letter… Like if it says, if the question says like um, “The, the answer’s gonna be in, I don’t know, like Section A,” that you only have to read Section A, you don’t have to read the whole thing. (Samantha Interview, 5-23-11)
Walter

Probably for tests, PASS. Probably for like history test, math test, English… [Because] it like, gives you an idea of what to do like along the way… It like gets you prepared for it and know what to do during it. (Walter Interview, 5-24-11)

Probably Paraphrasing and summarizing because it isn’t that hard to do…[but] I’m not really sure [how I will use what I’ve gained in this class in the future]. (Walter’s End-of-Year Survey, 6-6-11)

For Samantha and Walter, PASS, the test-taking strategy, was most useful (although Walter also noted in his end-of-year survey that he liked learning the paraphrasing and summarizing strategies because “it isn’t that hard to do”). Lily, however, took away something different from the course. For her, the most useful strategies she learned in Reading Workshop were the INFER and generalization strategies:

Inferring, generalization… Like when I had to infer like when I was in, yeah, when I was in Spanish class, like I had to infer the work that I had to do, to really like understand it. And like translate it to like English and Spanish. Or Spanish to English, or both… [And] biology. Um, like when I don’t understand like the big huge words that we have in biology and I have to like break them up and see what each word means. (Lily Interview, 5-26-11)

Here, Lily explains that she used the INFER strategy in her Spanish class “to infer the work that I had to do, to really like understand it.” She also alludes to her use of the PART strategy in biology to understand “the big huge words” and “break them up and see what each word means.” Lily seems to understand that by using the INFER strategy in Spanish and the PART strategy in Biology, she is engaging in the process of generalization that is such a central component of Ms. Cheung’s vision for the students in the class. Lily emphasized the importance of the INFER strategy again in her end-of-year survey, writing:

The most helpful strategy in school is INFER it helped me get through something I’m stuck on… These strategies will help me a lot through out life and my remanding of my high school years it helped me a lot when I was in this class. (Lily’s End-of-Year Survey, 6-6-11)

Here, Lily, like Victoria, makes connections between what she learned in her literacy class and how it will help her in school and beyond.

In addition to sharing an understanding of the objectives of Reading Workshop, Samantha and Walter had similar understandings about how they had changed as readers over the course of the year and both emphasized that they had begun to read longer books, but these understandings were not explicitly related to their work in the literacy class. Samantha explained:

I’m starting to like more, um, more mature books now. Um, like just a while ago, I like, I liked, um, I don’t know I really liked the Goosebumps series (Stine, 1992) but then I switched up to like those really thick books with the small printing… Like, um, or like, I guess kind of like Twilight (Meyer, 2005), that’s really big. I’ve never read anything like that big, except Twilight, but I mean before then. (Samantha Interview, 5-23-11)
Similarly, Walter said he saw “probably some [changes as a reader] but not a whole lot. Like, the length of the book. Probably, longer. Before it’s like this and eh-eh-eh, and I finally got *Harry Potter* year seven (Rowling, 2007)” (Walter Interview, 5-24-11).

Lily, on the other hand, talked about her changes as a reader in a different way. Though she believes that “reading and, ah, reading and writing” are her greatest strengths in the classroom, she also noted that, “I’ve got better [as a reader]… I understand a lot more words, can say a lot more words and under-like, understand, really understand the meaning of [the text] than I did before” (Lily Interview, 5-26-11). Unlike Samantha and Walter, therefore, Lily’s perceptions of how she had changed as a reader are related to the strategies that she found most valuable in the literacy class—specifically PART, which helped her to “understand a lot more words” and INFER, which she used to “really understand the meaning of [the text].” Moreover, she thought the generalization of these strategies provided her with ways to access and understand difficult texts in content-area classes like Spanish and Biology.

In the sections that follow, I will look more closely at Lily’s and Victoria’s understandings of the objectives of their literacy classes, how they enacted them in their day-to-day interactions in the classroom, and the outcomes of these understandings in terms of their perceptions of themselves as readers and students and how they positioned themselves in their respective literacy classrooms over the course of the school year.

**Victoria (Enhanced Reading): Reading as a Tool**

Victoria viewed reading itself as a tool that would help her to become a better reader and believed that “just reading” had been the most helpful thing she learned in Enhanced Reading. This understanding of the role of reading in the class aligns with Victoria’s idea of what it means to be a good reader, an understanding that remained consistent over the course of the second semester of her ninth-grade year. In January, Victoria described a good reader as someone who reads and perseveres even when a book is difficult to understand:

> To be a good reader you have to read, of course. You have to maybe read every night so you could get better at it, and, um, take your time. Also, um, know what it’s saying cuz sometimes you don’t get the book and um like read it carefully I guess so you could really understand it and if you don’t understand it, try to go back and figure it out. I think that’s a good reader… I think it’s just reading, you know, you have to read to become a better reader. If you don’t read, you’ll stay the same. (Victoria Interview, 1-5-11)

At the end of the school year, Victoria again described a good reader as someone who, simply, reads:

> [To be a good reader you have to] read. Cuz that makes you a better reader. Nothing else gonna make you a better reader but to read. Um, [good readers] just have to find a book that they like and read it. That’s all they have to do. But a lot of people are like, no, you know, on the phone or the computer or whatever, but really you just have to grab a book, sit down, read it, and you’ll get better. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

Victoria believes that actively reading is essential to becoming a better reader. But, in this
last quote, Victoria references her own ongoing struggle—as someone who is often
distracted by her phone—to read as much as she needs to in order to be a better reader.

Mr. Taylor’s understanding of what was most helpful to Victoria mirrored his
larger vision for the class, as well as Victoria’s own understanding. Like Victoria, Mr.
Taylor believed that independent reading was the most useful part of the class for her,
“specifically expecting her to read every day, requiring her to read, checking on her every
day, encouraging her.” Mr. Taylor noted, however, that the usefulness of independent
reading took…the whole year and every day” but that “it paid dividends overall” (Mr.
Taylor Interview, 6-3-11).

What Mr. Taylor does not mention, but I argue is apparent from his work with his
sixth period Enhanced Reading class, in general, and Victoria, in particular, is the way
that he consistently embedded strategy instruction into his reading curriculum. Unlike
Ms. Cheung, however, who framed her Reading Workshop class around a core set of
strategies, Mr. Taylor’s use of reading strategies was subtle, perhaps intentionally so, in
such a way that Victoria, Jack, and Nicholas’ take-away point from the class was the
importance of reading, not the importance of strategies.

“Catching Fire”

Victoria “caught fire,” in Mr. Taylor’s words, during the second half of the
second semester. Though she saw the class as an important part of her ability to improve
her reading, and, by association, her performance in school, as early as January, when we
had our first interview, it wasn’t until late spring that she began to enact this perspective.

In January, Victoria and I had a conversation about reading that indicates that she
saw the ability to read as something that had implications for her life beyond the
Enhanced Reading classroom. Specifically, Victoria reflected on the connection between
reading and participating in class at some length, contrasting her attitude toward
participating in middle school with her attitude as a ninth grader. I include the entire
conversation, below, for clarity:

Victoria: Sometimes. Sometimes [in middle school] I would have to read and I
wouldn’t want to, but one time [middle school teacher] made me and I had to, and
I guess it was okay. I was shy to participate. Even in math class I was shy to
participate, like to get up and like do a problem and stuff. I really wouldn’t want
to do that. I would just be shy. And now [in ninth grade] it’s like, yeah, I’ll get up
and do it, you know. I guess.

Kate: I was gonna ask you. Is it different this year than it was in middle school?
Victoria: Yeah, it’s different. I feel that, well, I met new people and I kinda, and I
want to like, um, I want to be more confident in class, like participating, and like
raising my hand like to read and like, “Oh, you know, like, I know that or I know
this.” I want to be like that, you know. And, yeah. So far that’s my goal and I’m,
like in Mr. Taylor’s class I’m like really actually reading, and-
Kate: I know, really well.
Victoria: Yeah. And, before I wouldn’t do that. I would just be like, “Yeah, pass.”
But, um, it’s not that bad, I actually kind of enjoy it. [Laughs.]
Kate: So what do you think’s different about this year than last year, if you don’t mind it this year but last year, or like in middle school it was, you didn’t like reading out loud?

Victoria: Yeah, that would be, to me that would be embarrassing, I wouldn’t want to do that.

Kate: So what do you think changed?

Victoria: Mm, I don’t know. I changed a lot, I think I changed a lot. Not, I mean not like, like me like how I lo- well yeah how I look too but how, I mean like how I think. I think I changed a lot cuz I wouldn’t use, I didn’t read. I wouldn’t do my work and now I kinda, I try a little bit more because I want to graduate and um and I want to go to college, so. It’s hard. I don’t want to do all this work but it’s more like [a] “if I have to” thing. But I think if I get my reading you know like more like fluent you know I think I’ll be better in life. (Victoria Interview, 1-5-11)

In this exchange, Victoria explains in great detail how her attitude toward school changed during her ninth-grade year. In particular, she highlights the importance of being confident in class and ties this quality directly to her ability to participate through reading that she has developed in Mr. Taylor’s class. She notes that she’s changed a lot in the transition from middle school to high school, in terms of both how she looks and her attitude toward her classes, but emphasizes the role of reading, in particular, in these changes, and its potential to help her “be better in life.”

Though Victoria could articulate the importance of reading in January, enacting this perspective was not an immediate thing. Rather, it was a process that spanned the entire academic year. In particular, Victoria continued to struggle with focus and participation during the second semester. Victoria explained her struggle with focus in the following way:

I struggle a lot in focusing and um and like if the teacher is going over this book or whatever, it’s just, it doesn’t really grab my attention, you know, I think I’m more of a person that I have to see things to learn. I’m just that kind of person. Cuz if you just give me this and that, and it’s like, I don’t know, it doesn’t really get my attention. It’s just like, “Okay,” you know. It’s just, I just do the work but it doesn’t stay, you know? It’s just, I just do it but then it’s like I forget about it. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

In addition, Victoria was not an active participant in class discussions. This is something that she herself noted that she struggled with as a student:

I don’t really like to participate. I’m more of the just sit and watch person. I mean if the teacher calls on me then I’ll answer, but it’s not like, “Oh,” you know, not, not all the time, it’s like once in a while I’ll do that. But I’m more of a quiet person. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

Indeed, Victoria remained quiet most of the time and rarely volunteered to read out loud or participate in class discussions. She often needed Mr. Taylor to remind her of their place in the book during group-reading time and the assignment directions during other activities. Mr. Taylor commented on this lack of focus, observing:
I think for a significant portion of the stuff we read out loud she was spaced out. She was either on her phone or daydreaming or just not used to reading, but she missed a lot of content over the course of the year when we read things out loud. Cer- I think for every book, for certain books and stories, much more so than others, some she was more engaged and she missed a lot less but she definitely, that, that approach to reading was marginally helpful for her, I don’t know, I don’t know a better way to do it with her. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 6-3-11)

As Mr. Taylor acknowledges, quite frequently this lack of attention was due to Victoria’s fascination with monitoring her phone and texting during class. Sometimes Victoria refused to participate even when Mr. Taylor specifically asked her to. For example, Mr. Taylor often asked students to choose parts to read in their group-reading text at the beginning of the period. One day in February, he asked students to choose parts to read in their current text, Fences (Wilson, 1986). Mr. Taylor asked Victoria to read the part of Rose, explaining that, “It will help you stay alert and follow along” (Field Note, 2-8-11). Victoria responded by asking if there were many parts for Rose. Mr. Taylor promised that “it isn’t too bad,” but Victoria ultimately refused his request. This was not always the case, however, especially when Mr. Taylor assured her that the reading part was small. At the end of March, for example, Victoria agreed to read the part of Greg in the group-reading text, American-Born Chinese (Yang, 2006) after Mr. Taylor assured her that “Greg is just one line and you get points for reading” (Field Note, 3-25-11).

One exception to this general lack of participation occurred during a fishbowl activity at the beginning of March. Prior to the start of this activity, Mr. Taylor asked the students to each write five good discussion questions about their group-reading text, Yummy (Neri, 2010). Then, he divided the class into two groups. Students with a green dot sat outside the circle. Students with an orange dot sat inside the circle and followed the protocol written on the board:

Fish Bowl (20 points)
Outside the circle: observe quietly and take notes.
Inside the circle: 1. Take turns completing: “I think Yummy was ______.”
2. Ask and answer your questions (Everyone talk at least once!)
3. Fill out self-evaluation

Earning and Losing Points
+ : ask a question, answer a question, include others in the discussion
- : electronic device, interruption, cursing/shut up/put down

Extra Credit: Use “smart” words like – theme, setting, narrator, sociopath, disciple, notorious, reap

Victoria began inside the circle and was an active participant in the group discussion. She responded to two questions posed by other students:
Jack: Why did they shoot Yummy? … What do you think, Victoria?

Victoria: Because he was becoming something big.

Student: Why did Yummy join the Black Disciples?

Victoria: Because he was lonely and didn’t have nothing to do. He didn’t have friends and he thought the gang would give him that.

And she asked two questions of her own, one factual and the other more interpretive: “Who gave Yummy the bear?” and “What kind of person does something and they don’t care?” Her participation prompted Mr. Taylor to comment to her at the end that she did a good job. Later on in the class, Mr. Taylor again complimented Victoria on her good work during the fishbowl discussion, saying, “Victoria, you really pulled it together today, I must say” (Field Note, 3-2-11). Though Mr. Taylor seemed generally frustrated by the way the fishbowl activity progressed (he observed to me that the group that followed Victoria’s group was the worst he’d seen all day), he also noted that there were some little victories, like Victoria’s higher level of participation.

Two other exceptions occurred during the second half of the second semester, and these exceptions are windows into the two conditions that led to Victoria’s catching fire. The first condition was related to Victoria’s intense interest in her independent reading book, *Snitch* (van Diepen, 2007). After she started reading this book, Victoria became very engaged with her independent reading at the beginning of class. Typically, the first 20 minutes of class began with Victoria arriving on time to class and immediately beginning to read. Indeed, Mr. Taylor sometimes gave her bonus points for being in her seat and reading when the bell rang. In addition, Victoria often continued to read even as the class moved on to other activities. On a Friday in March, for example, Victoria was not following along as the class read the weekly “Friday poem” out loud together. That day’s poem was “Jimmy Jet and his TV Set” (Silverstein, 1974). Mr. Taylor prefaced the poem by introducing the author, Shel Silverstein, and explaining that “this poem is a parable, a story with a moral.” Before Mr. Taylor read the poem out loud the first time, he asked Victoria to follow along. But, this time it was not because of her phone. Rather, she was still reading *Snitch*. She was so engrossed in her reading that Mr. Taylor had to stand by her as he read the poem and nudge the sheet with the poem on it toward her in an attempt to get her to stop reading her book and, instead, read the poem along with the rest of the class (Field Note, 3-25-11).

As the class prepared to read the poem a second time—this time with five students each reading out loud one stanza—Mr. Taylor said to Victoria, “Victoria, I know you didn’t read along the first time, so read it this time.” At the end of the second reading, Mr. Taylor and the class engaged in a discussion about what makes “Jimmy Jet and his TV Set” a parable. Mr. Taylor used this discussion to transition to their group-reading text, *American-Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006), which he’d highlighted in the agenda on the board as “The parable of Monkey King Part II” (Field Note, 3-25-11).

Over the course of the year, Victoria read 13 books in Enhanced Reading, but she was most proud of “reading that big book, *Snitch*…it’s pretty good” (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11). Her end-of-year letter reflects this same pride in reading *Snitch*. She wrote:
My favorite book I read independently was Snitch. Because it was really good and was very interesting. The book was about a girl that was a good girl. Then she meets this guy. She became to be bad and eventually got in a gang with her boyfriend. What I learned from the book was to decide my own choices not what other people presser me in to. My favorite genre are urban drama. (Victoria’s End-of-Year Letter, 6-16-11)

In May, Mr. Taylor observed that Victoria had really come into her own over the course of that month, noting that she read the entire book Snitch, which is 300+ pages, and seemed to be more engaged in her reading (Field Note, 5-17-11). In our second interview he observed:

I, I, I do think she has improved her reading fluency and has increased a little bit in confidence, reading independently and out loud. And I do think for her reading five books or however many it is, I don’t know exactly, is an accomplishment for her… She has grown as a reader… I don’t know if you’ve noticed this, during independent reading, it’s time to go on to the next thing, it’s the transition, and she doesn’t stop, she won’t stop. And it’s really hard, it’s like pulling, you know, something out of her, um, that’s deep engagement with the book. And I don’t know, I, I sense that’s a fairly new thing or it was an old thing that was forgotten and it still hasn’t cracked through, like I tell her. I even said this to her the other week. I said, “Victoria, I know you like this book and I know you like these books because when independent reading is over, you don’t want to close the book and you won’t even if I tell you, why don’t you just read it at home? I know you’re bored sometimes, you’ve got that book, you know you’re gonna like and it’s gonna help your grade and it’s gonna make you smarter and you’re gonna be a better reader,” and she’s like kinda laughing and says, “I don’t, yeah, I guess.” …She’s reading every day in class. Sometimes it takes her a little bit of time to get started but once she does she’s fully engrossed in the book. She’s not the fastest reader, but she reads I think earlier in the year you asked me about the success and I said the percentage of time kids are actively reading. During independent reading she has a high percentage of time that she’s actively reading partly because she stretches past the boundary. But then still the next day she’s you know this many pages further. It’s obviously, those are all the pages read in class. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 4-1-11)

At this point in the year, then, Victoria had become a reader in the class, but this change did not yet extend outside of school to reading at home.

Another exception occurred in May when the class read the book Emako Blue (Woods, 2004) together. While the group read, Victoria followed along with the rest of the class and did not object to reading out loud when called upon by Mr. Taylor. While Mr. Taylor explained the directions for the first of three written reflection assignments they would write that week, Victoria continued to read the book. The assignment, as presented in the agenda on the board, was as follows:

Written Reflection #1: Share your thoughts on the book, Emako Blue so far. Write predictions, questions, connections, and opinions. Use the sentence starters for ideas.
When Victoria put the book aside, she began writing immediately and without receiving any prompting from Mr. Taylor while other students in the class continued to talk. Although some of the students in the class were laughing and appeared to be distracted, Victoria continued to work through the noise. Mr. Taylor came by and glanced at Victoria’s notebook. He smiled as he said, “Excellent, good start, Victoria.” Victoria wrote half a page in her notebook by the end of class (see Figure 5.1), prompting Mr. Taylor to observe, “Victoria, you got right to work and it seems like you did a good job” (Field Note, 5-17-11).

It is possible that the explanation for Victoria’s “catching fire” experience is a result of her increased engagement, first with her independent reading book, *Snitch* (van Diepen, 2007), and later with the group-reading text, *Emako Blue* (Woods, 2004). In her end-of-year letter Victoria wrote about *Emako Blue*: “The book I liked that we read in class was Emako blue the genre was urban drama. I liked this book because it really got my attention and made me want to read it” (Victoria’s End-of-Year letter, 6-16-11). Mr. Taylor also saw the connection between Victoria’s increased engagement in class and *Emako Blue*:

She did really well with *Emako Blue*… She actually, we did three written reflections on that book, three in a row, one on each day, and she got an A plus on each one. And, I guess that right there, especially because it was a book we did read all together but she was engaged with it, she knew what was going on. … To see her get three A pluses in a row on written work was, you know, a new thing for her, maybe in any class, um, so that was nice… I was like, “Yeah. Good, good, good. Wow.” Cuz I graded them all at once. And I could tell, I could see that she was more engaged with that book than other books. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 6-3-11)

The first written reflection to which Mr. Taylor refers is the assignment discussed above, which asked students for their opinions of *Emako Blue* at that point in the book. Mr. Taylor provided the students with eight sentences starters in order to assist them as they
considered what they wanted to write about the book. The second and third written reflections were, in Mr. Taylor’s words, “more creative.” The second assignment was a letter to a character, and the third assignment was a text message dialogue between two characters in the book (see Figure 5.1). At the end of the second semester, Victoria began to enact some of the perspectives on reading that she articulated in our interview in January, and this change coincided with her particular interest in two books: *Snitch* and *Emako Blue*.

Figure 5.1

Victoria’s Written Reflections on *Emako Blue* (Woods, 2004)
At the end of the semester, Victoria continued to make connections between her changes as a reader in ninth grade and how this influenced her ability to do well in other areas of her life. Mr. Taylor noticed some of these changes as well:

She’s become a little more independent and more responsible, she still needs to work on both of those things. But, just towards the end of the year I’ve noticed that. I mean that, both bringing her book to class, reading at home, reading in class, asking for help when she needs help, getting started earlier on her work. (Mr. Taylor Interview, 6-3-11)

Victoria also talked about writing in terms of reading, noting that “the more that I read the more I became more fluent as well with my writing” (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11). For this reason, Victoria reflected on the importance of the Enhanced Reading class to her ability to do well in her other classes and in writing:

I think that’s, I think that’s the most important class that I have, to be honest because um it could really get you somewhere. I mean the other classes are important as well but for someone that is struggling with that, that’s really important, and I think if you are fluent in reading then you will do better in your other classes. And in writing as well. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

Victoria expanded on exactly how reading helped her in her other classes by focusing on how the reading she did in Enhanced Reading helped her to comprehend difficult texts in her other classes:
It was useful because you know if I was in class, you know, like they’re in a higher level and I’m in a little bit lower level, then you know I got to understand and right now when I read a passage that I’m in class, like in English or in history or something like that, then I could like read it, like read it, and I would understand what it says. Of course still sometimes I still don’t know certain words but like you know I try to sound them out and it, it works, so, I think it’s good to continue reading so I could get to a, to their level at least. (Victoria Interview, 6-2-11)

In her letter to Mr. Taylor at the end of the year, Victoria again noted that her reading had improved, but she did not go into the same level of detail in her letter as she did in our interview.

Mr. Taylor noticed these changes, as well, and described an exchange that he had with Victoria on the last day of independent reading when he asked her, “Do you want to turn in the book now cuz it’s the last day, we’re not gonna read it anymore, or do you want to take it home, extend the check out and try to finish over the weekend?” Mr. Taylor reported to me that Victoria told him “she wanted to take it home and finish it” (Mr. Taylor Interview, 6-3-11), which indicates a change in perspective for Victoria over time, particularly in terms of her reading outside of school.

At times, Victoria enacted her perspective on reading in her other classes. In English, for example, Victoria’s teacher expressed surprise at her very good work on the midterm (she earned a B, which brought her semester grade up from an F to a D), particularly in light of her apparent lack of engagement in class throughout the semester. However, because this “catching fire” happened so late in the school year, it was outside the scope of my study to determine the extent to which, and in what ways, it influenced her approach to her other classes in those final weeks of ninth grade. For Victoria, the Enhanced Reading class was a place where she could read a lot in order to become a better reader, participate more in her classes, and imagine what it would be like to go to college and find success in life. Victoria not only articulated this perspective but also began to enact and embody it at the end of the year. One of the outcomes of Victoria’s participation in Enhanced Reading, therefore, was a qualitative shift in her identity as a reader, and possibly even as a learner. By seeing reading as a tool that would help her to achieve her goals, reading became personally meaningful in a way that it had not been earlier in the year.

At the same time, however, it is unclear to what extent Victoria internalized or was even conscious of the reading strategies that Mr. Taylor embedded into the reading curriculum throughout the year. There were some indications that the class had taught her to be more metacognitive as she read. For example, in her description of how the reading she did in Enhanced Reading helped her with her work in other classes, she noted that she could understand passages in her English and history classes better and that she would try to sound out the words she did not know. Although the objective of this class for Victoria was on reading more to become a better reader, and this objective clearly superseded any others, it is possible that one of the outcomes of the class was an elevated consciousness of herself as a reader who could apply the knowledge she gained in Mr. Taylor’s class to help her when faced with a difficult text.
Lily (Reading Workshop): Strategies as Tools

While Victoria focused on reading itself as the most important part of the Enhanced Reading class, Lily focused on specific strategies—inferring and generalization, in particular—that she had learned in Reading Workshop. She explained that the INFER strategy was helpful because it “help[ed] us make it easier, like to understand things better,” and, relatedly, that the generalization strategy was helpful because it allowed her to use the strategies she learned in the literacy class in her other classes:

To use one strategy more, one strategy in other classes, like INFER, use the INFER in different classes and all of that. To help us, to like use, like, I don’t know, I think it’s to like understand stuff better, to like, I don’t know how to explain it. To really like know what we’re doing and to see it in different ways, maybe. (Lily Interview, 5-26-11)

Specifically, she discussed using the INFER strategy in Spanish class and using the PART strategy in Biology. It is significant that Lily identified Spanish and Biology as the two classes where the strategies she learned in Reading Workshop were most helpful because these were two of her most difficult classes in ninth grade (she received Cs in Spanish both semesters and a D and then an F in Biology).

In her end-of-year survey, Lily indicated (by ranking them 5 out of 5) that most of the other strategies were helpful to her as well:

5  CLUE (Prediction Strategy)
5  Action Plan/Goal Setting
5  PASS (Test-Taking Strategy)
5  Paraphrasing and Summarization Strategy
5  INFER
5  Generalization

She expanded on the usefulness of the INFER strategy, in particular, noting that it was “the most helpful strategy in school” because “it helped me get through something I’m stuck on” (Lily’s End-of-Year Survey, 6-6-11). She gave PART/FIND and I-Search lower ratings as follows:

2  PART/FIND (Bridging Strategy—this included oral fluency)
3  I-Search

Ms. Cheung also noted and commented on Lily’s use of the generalization strategy:

Yeah, I mean she just, and it might, she might come to mind for me because of the way she does take her notes and everything, but I really can see the thinking and how she’s, you know, summarizing her notes and um applying strategies. And I’ve seen her work on a number of different content areas, so I know for her, um, I, I think Lily also has done well with generalization. Again I’ve seen her u- apply it to a number of different content areas, I think it’s cool that she’s used Spanish a number of times, which, you know, that might not have been the first- I, I love that they’re using other things aside from English, you know? English is the
obvious one but um both Samantha and Lily, they’ve used science, Lily’s done Spanish, math, PE, you know, and that’s the whole point. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)

Lily’s emphasis on INFER and generalization but not on PART is interesting in light of her shifting definition of a good reader, which focused increasingly on the ability to understand and say words. During our first interview, she explained that good readers “understand where [the author is] coming from…and to understand who the author is…and the history about the author. That’s the same thing but yeah…To understand words, too” (Lily Interview, 12-15-10). She expanded on this definition by noting that her mother is a good reader because “she understands a lot of things, like she can understand, relate to the author that she reads… And she understands a lot of vocabulary. Big vocabulary” (Lily Interview, 12-15-10). Here, understanding words is secondary to another characteristic of good reading—understanding the author. In our final interview, however, Lily focused more on the importance of knowing and pronouncing words. She explained that good readers

understand how to say the words, to like make syllables, know the syllables…You have to like reading cuz if you don’t really like reading you can’t, or maybe that’s just me, how I look at it, but yeah. If you don’t like reading, you can’t, your heart isn’t in it you really just can’t say like the words you, big words. (Lily Interview, 5-26-11)

In this definition, the key features of being a good reader are word-level decoding skills, as well as enjoying reading. Despite this emphasis on words, however, Lily thought that the PART strategy was the least helpful to her in school, writing in her end-of-year survey that “PART [was the least helpful] because you can just do it in your head” and “My least favorit unit/strategy is part b/c its to easy” (Lily’s End-of-Year Survey, 6-6-11).

A “Subtle Slump”

Whereas Victoria “caught fire” in the second semester of Enhanced Reading, Lily experienced, in Ms. Cheung’s words, a “subtle slump” in the second semester of Reading Workshop. Although Lily reported that the strategies she learned in Reading Workshop were important and useful for her work in other classes, she began to show signs of disengagement as the end of the year approached.

Lily was popular and social in class throughout the year. Boys, in particular, went out of their way to get Lily’s attention and engage her in conversation. At times, Lily leveraged her popularity in order to keep her peers in line. In April, for example, one student made fun of another student for being “albino,” and Lily stepped in, saying, “Shut up, that’s mean” (Field Note, 4-11-11). Ms. Cheung noticed this characteristic, explaining:

I think she is a leader. I think she really has some like awesome like people skills, you know. She is caring, she listens, she gets along with different people, um, she’s easy to work with, you know, she’s got all that. And then she’s got a little spunk to her too… Anytime she’s at a table, and she’s pretty much sat with everybody at some point, she just, she just, seamless, you know, just fine, she just goes with it, you know. Um, she’s like, she’s great to have in class. I love her…
No problems, you know what I mean. But at the same time you know she has her little, like she, she’s got her personality, she’s got her spunk, but she’s not, she doesn’t have any issues with anyone. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 4-5-11)

For the most part, this socializing did not get in the way of Lily’s work in Reading Workshop. On most days, Lily was an eager student—actively and respectfully listening to Ms. Cheung and her peers and regularly volunteering answers. Ms. Cheung saw Lily as a good student, as well, saying, “I would put her as more like a classic [Reading Workshop] kid. Like maybe a year or two behind, needed to sharpen up the skills, like, she, she knows how to do school, um, but she needs to just sharpen up, sharpen up her skills,” adding later that “she seems to be pretty comfortable and confident with herself as a student” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 6-2-11). Indeed, Lily represented herself as someone who cares about her schoolwork and wants to do well academically. At the beginning of the second semester, for example, Lily told Ms. Cheung and the rest of the class that one of her expectations/goals for rest of the year was “to get my grades higher, to a B-average. It’s a goal.” Later that same day, she commented to her friend, “I can’t believe I got an A [on the first semester final exam]” (Field Note, 1-24-11).

During one class period at the beginning of February, Lily showed particular enthusiasm for the weekly vocabulary assignment in which students, in groups of four, presented the definition, word forms, and usage for one science vocabulary word. This activity, which students typically engaged in on Fridays, was one of Ms. Cheung’s principle ways of integrating work from students’ other classes into the Reading Workshop curriculum. When class began, Lily already had a dictionary out, along with a blank transparency and a red pen. She raised her hand and practically jumped out of her seat as she eagerly asked to be assigned the vocabulary word “control” (the other word options were theory, observation, replicate, and model). When Ms. Cheung granted her request, Lily began writing on the transparency as the other three group members looked on. At one point, Lily exclaimed, “I can’t find the verb form, only the noun” and Ms. Cheung came over to talk with her about it, explaining that she should be able to find a verb form, as in “to control someone.” When Lily’s group presented their word, they provided the following definition: Control (N) – the ability or power to make someone or something do what you want, or to make something happen in the way you want: The disease robs you of muscle control (v) controlled, controlling (Field Note, 2-1-11). Two things are particularly striking about this example. First is Lily’s intense interest in being assigned the word “control” and her subsequent absorption in the task of defining the word despite her group members’ lack of interest in the activity. Second is the fact that the definition of “control” that Lily looked up and then wrote down on her transparency is not the scientific definition of the word (as it would be defined in the context of the scientific term “control group,” for example). No one in the class, including Ms. Cheung or Lily herself, seemed to recognize that she had used an incorrect definition. Lily’s enthusiasm for the mechanics of the assignment came at the expense of more critical thought about it, and this seemed to be an increasingly more common trend for her work in Reading Workshop as the year progressed.

Lily began to show other, more explicit signs of disengagement as the semester progressed, something that Ms. Cheung noticed as well. In mid-April, for example, Lily actively demonstrated her disinterest in the PASS strategy. At the beginning of the class,
Ms. Cheung reminded the students that “one week from today we’ll be starting the STAR [CST] tests.” She specifically discussed the ELA test and reminded them that they’ll have a test on the PASS strategy on Friday. In preparation for Friday’s test and the STAR tests the following week, therefore, the class reviewed the PASS strategy together. As the class began to discuss the strategy, Lily turned sideways in her chair and faced away from Ms. Cheung. Ms. Cheung, noticing the move, asked Lily to please turn around. As the students recited the steps of the PASS strategy (Prepare to succeed, Analyze the directions, Summarize each question, Survey the test) in unison with Ms. Cheung, Lily did not join them. However, as Ms. Cheung directed the students to “look over questions one through four” and then observed, “I see people writing on their tests, which in and of itself is a strategy…remember, you can write on the test,” Lily leaned over her desk and began focused work on the assignment. Later, as Ms. Cheung went over the questions with the class, Lily voluntarily supplied answers to two of the questions. After she responded the second time, however, she turned around in her chair so that she was again facing away from Ms. Cheung (Field Note, 4-11-11).

In May and June, I recorded numerous instances of Lily texting during class, talking disruptively with other students, and appearing bored, all behaviors that did not appear in my field notes earlier in the semester. This change in attitude did not go unnoticed by Ms. Cheung, who observed:

If anything it seemed like there were some personal issues going on. Cuz you know sometimes the head would be down or she just looked really, I don’t know kinda down or something, you know? Ah-um, which didn’t happen as much earlier in the year, yeah, so. I noticed there was a little bit of like a, maybe an emotional slump there… She’s not the kind of kid that like takes that out on other kids or you know it’s not like this big blow up or whatever, so, you know, if it was going on it was pretty subtle. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 6-2-11)

The personal issues to which Ms. Cheung refers include Lily’s father, who is a paraplegic, being put on bed rest for an extended period of time in the early spring (Field Note, 1-31-11) and Lily’s cousin being killed by her boyfriend, a memory that Lily brought up to the class when they were discussing their Thinking Reading book, Tears of a Tiger (Draper, 1994), and, specifically, the main character, Andy’s, “weird” and “creepy” questions and comments about his deceased friend, Robbie. Lily defended Andy’s comments during this discussion and told the class that she had similar thoughts after her cousin died (Field Note, 3-29-11). Four days later, in a “text-to-self” assignment that asked students to make connections between the text and their own personal experiences, Lily reflected further on her cousin’s death and how her memories of it relate to Andy’s feelings of guilt in Tears of a Tiger (see Figure 5.2).

This is not to say, however, that Lily completely disengaged with the class. At the very end of the semester, for example, Lily completed her culminating I-Search project early by working on her presentation at home (something that the students were not required to do), and she volunteered to present first (Field Note, 6-2-11). At the end of class on the day of Lily’s presentation, Ms. Cheung told me that she was pleased with Lily’s presentation, which was on Duke Paoa Kahinu Mokoe Hulikohola Kahanamoku, an Olympic swimmer from Hawaii. Lily’s oral presentation included a three-panel poster as her visual aid with typed questions, pictures, and Duke’s name handwritten in bubble
letters at the top. In her presentation she explained that she picked Duke as the subject of her I-Search project because “there’s a statue of him in Waikiki” and she “never knew very much about him and wanted to learn more” (Field Note, 6-3-11). Lily’s “subtle slump” was, in fact, subtle, and suggested somewhat variable levels of engagement in class that seemed to coincide with the extent to which she was able to engage with the course content in meaningful ways.

Figure 5.2
Lily’s Text-to-Self Assignment for *Tears of a Tiger* (Draper, 1994)

Though Lily’s interest in Reading Workshop appeared to wane, or at least become more variable, during the second semester, one thing that remained constant was her interest in reading. At the end of most classes, Ms. Cheung read to the students from their Thinking Reading book. The class read three books together during the second semester: *Copper Sun* (Draper, 2006), *Tears of a Tiger* (Draper, 1994), and *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001), and during Thinking Reading time, Lily appeared to read along with Ms. Cheung and answer questions about the book. Lily particularly enjoyed *Copper Sun* and wrote in her end-of-year survey that it was her favorite because “it shows me how things used to be.” On the occasions when the students had a chance to read their SIR books in class—an opportunity that arose most often during English class rather than Reading Workshop—Lily read diligently despite frequent distractions from other students in the class. On at least one occasion, Lily continued to read her SIR book as Reading Workshop began, prompting Ms. Cheung to tell her to put it away until the end of class (Field Note, 4-5-11). Lily’s deep engagement with books, which at times led her to experience reading in ways similar to the students in Enhanced Reading, contrasted with her more superficial engagement in the strategy-focused aspects of the class.
Nonetheless, Lily believed that the INFER, generalization, and I-Search lessons had implications for her ability to do well in her classes throughout high school. Specifically, she was proud of her I-Search project on Duke Paoa Kahinu Mokoe Hulikohola Kahanamoku and believed that the research experience that she gained through the I-Search project would help her with the future research projects she anticipated doing in history and English: “To learn how to research stuff, like when we get older to like understand researching, how to research, basically” (Lily Interview, 5-26-11). She spoke in less-specific terms about generalization and its usefulness in math and science and INFER as something that she was proud of and that would help her in her future English and science classes “cuz that’s where basically where we read…maybe math too cuz of geometry…all of that Pythagorean theorem and all of that” (Lily Interview, 5-26-11). In her end-of-year survey, Lily also referenced the paraphrasing and summarization strategies as strategies that would be useful to her in the coming years because they “helped me a ton this year” (Lily’s End-of-Year Survey, 6-6-11). Overall, Lily was very positive about the strategies that she learned in the class, writing in her end-of-year survey that she believed the strategies helped her in the Reading Workshop class and would help her during her remaining high school years as well as throughout her life. Lily’s explanations of how these strategies helped her are quite vague, however, and suggest a somewhat superficial level of understanding of them.

Though Lily believes that reading and writing are her greatest strengths in school, she also noted that she became a better reader over the course of her ninth-grade year. She focused particularly on her improved ability to understand words and extrapolate meaning from texts. This focus on understanding words mirrors Lily’s definition of a good reader at the end of the year, where she focused specifically on a good reader’s ability to pronounce and understand complex vocabulary words. Lily also believed that she had changed as a student, more generally, by becoming more focused on her schoolwork:

I actually like school way more than I did in middle school, like since I came to Southern High…like yes I got into the, I don’t know cuz like when I lived in [name of city approximately 30 miles north of her current residence] like I the people, cuz I guess I don’t really hang out with people here. Like I just, my sister, my brother, same people like I grew up with, that I knew before, that when I lived out here before. And, yeah, I guess I don’t really hang out and my mind is focused on school now, and other stuff. (Lily Interview, 5-26-11)

Ms. Cheung reflected on Lily’s reading in the context of the strategies they learned in the class, but she focused most on the benefits of the student-level strategies for Lily. Significantly, Ms. Cheung also observed that Lily does not always complete assignments as “carefully or thoughtfully as she could”:

I hope, my hope is that she’s become a little more careful with her reading, like. And so like with something like Socratic seminar, that’s like a perfect activity for her because I think you know she, she doesn’t always do things like as carefully or as thoughtfully as she could and so I think if anything that’s what the strategies are good for, for her. You know, you know, be more metacognitive about why am I doing this and what am I looking for and how does this support what I’m saying, thinking, writing. Um, summarizing and looking for main ideas and all of that…
So she really, so I think it was a really, that’s, she’s a solid placement. (Ms. Cheung Interview, 6-2-11)

Ms. Cheung also noted the importance of the goal-setting strategy for Lily, which she described as “thinking ahead and like reflecting, you know what am I doing, how is this working well for me or not for me,” and recounted, “She wanted to change something on her plan which to me, I actually didn’t look at what it was, but just the fact that she was doing that, like, ‘Oh I want to revise this and I need to add this and.’ That’s great” (Ms. Cheung Interview, 6-2-11).

For Lily, Reading Workshop was an opportunity to develop a strategic mindset and an accompanying repertoire of strategies that she could draw on to assist her in school. Although Lily could articulate which strategies she found most helpful, it was not clear to what extent these tools were meaningful to her beyond her somewhat superficial familiarity with them. One of the outcomes of Lily’s participation in Reading Workshop, therefore, was a quantitative shift in the contents of her strategy toolkit. Over the course of the year, Lily amassed a variety of different strategies that she felt confident she could draw on in a variety of academic contexts.

Discussion

Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop re-mediated students’ reading in different ways. These different approaches to re-mediation were informed by what Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung believed were the underlying causes of their students’ struggles with reading and, relatedly, how they framed their classes in order to align with these beliefs. The students in both classes internalized their respective teacher’s framing of the class. In Enhanced Reading, the focal students who remained in the class throughout the second semester—Jack, Nicholas, and Victoria—all articulated an overarching objective of reading more in order to become better readers. This common understanding of the objective of the class was one that they shared with Mr. Taylor. In Reading Workshop, the three focal students who remained in the class throughout the second semester—Lily, Samantha, and Walter—had an understanding of the objective of the class that focused on the importance of strategies to their academic work. However, the specific strategies that the focal students emphasized differed: Samantha and Walter thought that PASS, the test-taking strategy, was most useful, while Lily emphasized the importance of the INFER and generalizations strategies to her ability to complete her work and comprehend difficult texts in her content-area classes. While Ms. Cheung noted the importance of all of the strategies, including PASS, she placed the most emphasis on students’ abilities to use the INFER strategy and to generalize it (along with the other strategies that they learned during the year) to their work in other classes. Therefore, of the three focal students, Lily’s understanding of the objectives of the class was the one that most closely aligned with Ms. Cheung’s understanding.

For Victoria and Lily, however, the outcomes of the two different approaches to re-mediation played out in different ways. On one hand, Enhanced Reading facilitated Victoria’s personal engagement as a reader, which, in turn, fostered her understanding of reading as a tool that she believed she could use to do better in school and achieve her goals in school and beyond. Although Mr. Taylor regularly embedded strategies into the Enhanced Reading curriculum, Victoria did not seem to be conscious of these strategies
and their usefulness to her as a reader. This lack of consciousness is consistent with Mr. Taylor’s framing of his class. Although strategy instruction was a part of every reading activity in which his students engaged throughout the school year, he did not call attention to this aspect of the class. Instead, he emphasized the importance of reading as a virtue in and of itself but, at the same time, he discussed reading as a tool that his students could and should use to achieve their goals in and out of school. The primary outcome of the class for Victoria was that she had begun to see herself as a reader by the end of the year. A secondary outcome is that she also might have internalized some of the strategies that Mr. Taylor embedded into his curriculum as part of her work in the class. Indeed, some of her discussions about how she approached difficult texts in classes like English and history—with more confidence and a willingness to try to figure out unfamiliar words—suggests that she had begun to internalize some of the strategies that Mr. Taylor worked into his curriculum.

One the other hand, Reading Workshop introduced Lily to a series of strategies that she could use to help her better understand texts in her content-area classes and, in turn, do better in school. Having a toolkit of strategies seemed to add to her confidence as a student. Lily did not, however, make connections between the strategies that she learned in Reading Workshop and her existing identity as a reader. Just as Victoria’s lack of consciousness of reading strategies was consistent with Mr. Taylor’s framing of the class, Lily’s lack of connections between the strategies she learned in Reading Workshop and her personal engagement as a reader is consistent with Ms. Cheung’s framing of her class. Although Ms. Cheung was very explicit about the importance of reading strategies to her students’ current and future success in school, the act of reading itself was rarely discussed. Instead, Ms. Cheung emphasized the importance of the strategies as tools that her students could and should use to do better in school and on tests, particularly in the context of coursework and exams that asked students to read passages and answer comprehension questions. The primary outcome of the class for Lily, therefore, was a consciousness of her own ability to be strategic in her approach to reading and other coursework in her content-area classes. However, based on my interviews with and observations of Lily over the course of the school year, Lily did not seem to make connections between the strategies that she acquired in Reading Workshop and her own personal relationship with reading which she fostered through the Silent Independent Reading (SIR) she did in her English class and, on occasion, in Reading Workshop. Although Lily appeared engaged in the “Thinking Reading” aspect of Reading Workshop, in which Ms. Cheung read out loud from a group-reading text in order to model the strategies that they were learning, Thinking Reading took a backseat to the more important work of providing students with strategies that would help them be better students, and this—not reading for pleasure—is what Lily took away from the class.

Victoria and Lily’s very different understandings of the objectives of their respective literacy intervention courses are reflective of the correspondingly different outcomes of the classes for these students. Jack and Nicholas in Enhanced Reading followed paths similar to Victoria, with outcomes that indicate increases in engagement with reading and emerging identities as readers. What is less clear is the extent to which the students in Enhanced Reading internalized the strategies that Mr. Taylor embedded in the curriculum as part of their personal engagement with reading. Samantha and Walter in Reading Workshop followed paths similar to Lily, with outcomes that indicate an
increase in awareness of the ability to use strategies in order to do better in school and, in Samantha and Walter’s cases, specifically, do better on tests. For none of the focal students in Reading Workshop, however, was there evidence that this strategic knowledge connected in meaningful ways to their identities as readers or personal relationships with reading.

These findings reveal that the way that teachers frame their literacy intervention classes has direct implications for what students will see as the objectives of those classes and, relatedly, what the outcomes of the classes will be for those students. Taken together, the findings in this dissertation highlight the importance of considering the assumptions about students and their reading practices that underlie different interventions and how these assumptions inform what re-mediation looks like in different contexts.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Literacy intervention classes are complex spaces in which institutional and pedagogical conditions, teacher expectations, and student identities and understandings intersect. One purpose of this study has been to better understand how literacy intervention classes like Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop operate from the perspectives of the students who take them. A second but equally important purpose has been to consider the ways in which students’ perspectives might extend or challenge the theory of re-mediation that informed this study. In achieving these two purposes, I have been reminded again and again about the ways that students’ classroom experiences are influenced in direct and indirect ways by the multiple contexts in which teaching and learning interactions occur. In this chapter, I begin by revisiting the theoretical underpinnings of this work. Then, I highlight the key findings and related issues that emerged from my analysis before turning to a discussion of some of the implications of this work for practice and future research.

Re-mediation and Identity

Re-mediation as it was originally conceived by Cole and Griffin (1983) was a way to talk about and critique traditional approaches to remedial reading instruction for young children in elementary school that focused on a student’s ability to correctly read individual words in the context of a system of mediation restricted to the student, the teacher, and the text. Cole and Griffin proposed an alternative that focused on reading-as-interpretation of the world, in which the activity of reading—“the image of reading as a whole” (p. 72)—is the focus. What I have attempted to do in this dissertation is to consider what re-mediation might look like for adolescents: ninth graders who, for various reasons, are perceived to struggle with reading. What I have found is that some students who are perceived to struggle in this way already see reading as a whole activity and texts as tools that mediate their relationship with their environment. To envision reading instruction for these students in the same way that Cole and Griffin envision reading instruction for students who are just learning to read and who lack this understanding of reading-as-interpretation of the world is to miss an important piece of the puzzle.

This is why incorporating a theory of identity that takes into account how identities are developed and refined in the context of specific activities and social practices is an essential addition to a theory of re-mediation, particularly for older students whose identities as readers and students have been developed and shaped over many years in and out of school. As Holland and her colleagues (1998) remind us, identities “are lived in and through activity” and “developed in social practice” (p. 5). Therefore, appropriate re-mediation for one student may be entirely inappropriate for another. Moreover, in light of the symbiotic relationship between activities and identities, successful re-mediation involves not just a shift in the way that mediating devices

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8 This is not to say that identity is a less important factor to consider for younger students. Although my findings relate specifically to ninth graders, they suggest that the identities that students bring to their classroom experiences are important to consider at any age.
regulate coordination with the environment but also a shift in a subject’s relationship to his or her environment. In this sense, efforts to understand individual students and how to tailor instruction to meet their needs in light of their personal histories and identities is critical to future theoretical discussions of re-mediation and what it might look like in specific classrooms, for specific students.

**Discussion of Key Findings**

In the sections that follow, I highlight three key findings that emerged from my analysis and that serve as support for my argument that a theory of re-mediation for adolescents must also include a corresponding theory of identity. I argue that an identity component is a crucial addition to the mediational triangle in order to sufficiently take into account the role of the subject and, specifically, the ways in which his or her personal histories and identities themselves act as mediators.

**Institutional Support Matters, but Students Must Be Part of the Conversation**

For any activity, context matters. Engeström (1987) drew attention to this point in his expansion of the mediational triangle to include rules, community, and division of labor as important components of activity systems. Therefore, the support structures that were in place for the teachers and students in the literacy classes shaped what re-mediation looked like in these spaces. These support structures and their associated histories and organizations also determined the extent to which students had a role in shaping the instruction that occurred in their classrooms. Mr. Taylor operated in nearly complete isolation as the sole creator, implementer, and teacher of Enhanced Reading. In contrast, what happened in Ms. Cheung’s Reading Workshop classroom was informed by a variety of different support structures at the school and district levels, as well as other supports through involvement with the University of Kansas’ literacy initiatives.

There is little doubt that institutional support is an important factor in the sustainability of an intervention. Indeed, on its surface, the lack of support experienced by Mr. Taylor made the sustainability of Enhanced Reading far less certain, while the much higher level of support that Ms. Cheung had at Southern High indicated a measure of stability and security for the Reading Workshop class. However, these varying levels of support also had an influence on how the teachers viewed their classes and, in turn, shaped the nature of instruction in the two spaces. Because of the multiple communities in which Ms. Cheung engaged around her Reading Workshop class, and because of the structured nature of the literacy curriculum, Ms. Cheung focused her attention on the ways in which she and her colleagues might strengthen the ties between the different tiers of the system in order to streamline the process and create more comprehensive support structures for students. Ms. Cheung placed less emphasis on changing the Reading Workshop curriculum, which had been validated by research conducted at the University of Kansas.

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9 However, it’s worth noting again that in the two years after the study year both classes experienced reductions in enrollment and at both school sites there is currently just one literacy class offered to incoming ninth graders. This similar change at both schools suggests that the level of school- and district-level support is not necessarily an accurate indicator of program security and sustainability.
of Kansas, approved by the district as representing a best practices approach to literacy instruction, and satisfactory tailored in previous years by Ms. Cheung and her colleagues.

In contrast, the Enhanced Reading curriculum was constantly evolving to meet the needs of Mr. Taylor and his particular students in the context of the specific teaching and learning interactions in which he engaged with them on a daily basis throughout the school year. This is not to suggest that Mr. Taylor knew or cared more about his students than did Ms. Cheung. Rather, it is to stress a difference in focus that stemmed from the very different institutional and pedagogical contexts in which the two teachers found themselves. Necessarily, then, Mr. Taylor’s thinking about Enhanced Reading was most influenced by his interactions with his students in the classroom, and his thinking about the course centered on how he might adapt his instruction to meet the needs of his students. In contrast, Ms. Cheung’s thinking about Reading Workshop was most influenced by the conversations and interactions in which she was engaged about the class and focused on the larger contexts in which the class operated.

These findings indicate that institutional support, while important, can have the unintended effect of shifting the focus of instruction from the students and their particular needs in the context of a specific classroom to broader concerns about the intervention and its relationship to the various school-, district-, and curriculum-level communities that inform and interact with it.

**How Teachers Frame Instruction Matters, but Student Buy-in Is Important**

A basic tenant of reading re-mediation is that it is an opportunity for teachers and students to work together to change students’ views of reading in positive ways. Teachers’ understandings of the underlying causes of their students’ struggles and the corresponding instructional approaches they used to address these root causes led to different ways of re-mediating reading. In Enhanced Reading, Mr. Taylor’s goal was to change students’ reading habits and attitudes toward reading. In Reading Workshop, Ms. Cheung’s goal was to provide students with the strategies that they would need to be good readers and students in their other content-area classes. In both classes, however, student buy-in was important to success. Therefore, a student whose identity and perspective on the literacy class aligned with the teacher’s was more successful. Jack in Enhanced Reading and Samantha in Reading Workshop came to their respective classes with identities as readers that aligned with how their teachers framed the classes. Dennis in Enhanced Reading and Tory in Reading Workshop, however, brought identities as readers that did not align with the ways that their teachers had framed the classes and the students who take them. These varying degrees of alignment affected students’ ways of participating and ability to be successful in their respective classes.

Dennis viewed himself as a good reader, and this identity did not align with Mr. Taylor’s framing of the class as an opportunity for poor readers to change their reading habits and attitudes toward reading. At the same time, however, Mr. Taylor also believed that a class that encourages students to read texts they enjoy reading could and should be beneficial to anyone. So, even though there were indications that perhaps Enhanced Reading was not an appropriate placement for Dennis—Mr. Taylor himself noted that Dennis had likely been a good reader at one point—transferring out of the class was not a viable option. For Mr. Taylor, everyone—poor reader or not—could benefit from more
opportunities to engage in routine, high-interest reading and the related strategies that Mr. Taylor embedded into the curriculum on a daily basis. For Dennis, however, operating within the confines of a class geared toward re-mediating students’ reading in the way envisioned by Cole and Griffin (1983) was debilitating because he already viewed and used reading as a means of navigating and making sense of the world. Therefore, in order to buy-in to the class as it was framed and participate in the reading activities, Dennis would have had to adapt his existing identity as a reader, and this was not something he was willing to do.

In contrast, Tory, who also viewed herself as a good reader, successfully advocated to transfer out of Reading Workshop by demonstrating to Ms. Cheung that she already possessed the skills and strategies that good readers use to be successful. This was a viable option in Ms. Cheung’s class because she framed her approach to re-mediation around providing her students with strategies that good readers use. This means that a student like Tory who could prove that she was a good reader had no need for the class because, presumably, as a good reader she already possessed the strategies that she would learn in the class.

These findings support the need for a theory of re-mediation that takes into account students’ personal histories and identities as readers by highlighting the alienating effects of placing students into classes that are framed in a way that not only assumes that they struggle with reading, but that they struggle with reading in a specific way. How Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung framed the reading activities that occurred in their classrooms were successful for students like Jack and Samantha whose identities as readers aligned with the course objectives. However, these framings, complete with compulsory enrollment in the classes, were unsuccessful for students like Dennis and Tory who brought conflicting identities to their respective classrooms.

**The Approach to Re-mediation Matters, but It Looks Different Depending on the Student and the Context**

From a theoretical standpoint, the ideal outcome of reading re-mediation is that students come to see reading as a mediating device that provides them with a means through which to interpret the word. Cole and Griffin (1983) contend that this outcome requires that teachers and students work together to develop activities that promote an image of reading as a whole activity. Mr. Taylor’s objective in his Enhanced Reading classroom was to re-mediate reading in a way that is consistent with Cole and Griffin’s theory. He explicitly framed the course around the act of reading while consistently but subtly embedding strategies and talk about texts into his curriculum. His students shared his understanding of the stated goal for the course—reading a lot in order to become better, more informed readers, students, and people—and one of the outcomes of this orientation toward reading was that students made connections between their work in Enhanced Reading and their emerging identities as readers and students. For Victoria, specifically, the class led to personal engagement as a reader and an understanding of reading itself as a tool that she could use to do better in school, achieve her goals, and find success in life beyond high school. The extent to which Victoria understood and internalized the strategies that Mr. Taylor embedded into his curriculum is less clear; however, there were some indications that a secondary outcome of the class was that she
had begun to develop a more strategic mindset as part of her increased confidence as a reader.

Ms. Cheung’s objective in her Reading Workshop class was to re-mediate reading in a way that was different from Mr. Taylor’s approach, through an explicit focus on reading strategies. Her students shared her understanding of the stated goal for the course—mastering a series of strategies that they could use to do better in school and on tests. One of the outcomes of this approach to re-mediation was that students developed a repertoire of tools from which they could draw. For Lily, in particular, the class led to consciousness of her ability to be strategic in her approach to reading and other coursework in her content-area classes. However, Lily’s personal relationship with reading and her identity as a reader were not connected to the work in which she engaged in Reading Workshop.

These findings reveal that students do indeed appropriate and internalize the objectives of their courses as envisioned by their teachers, particularly in these two literacy classes where the teachers worked hard to make the goals of their respective courses explicit to the students. These findings also demonstrate how Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop, with their quite different objectives, re-mediated students’ reading in different ways and, in turn, resulted in different outcomes for their students. Mr. Taylor’s Enhanced Reading class privileged reading as a whole activity over the component parts of reading and, therefore, his approach is most consistent with re-mediation as Cole and Griffin (1983) envisioned it. This is not to say, however, that Ms. Cheung’s approach in Reading Workshop is less important or noteworthy. In fact, taken together, the two approaches to re-mediation suggest that any instructional setting would do well to explicitly attend to strategic reading in the context of authentic literacy practices.

**Re-mediation Shapes Students’ Identities, but Students’ Identities Should Also Shape Re-mediation**

When taken together, the findings discussed above reveal just how much students have to contribute to discussions about their educational experiences. At the same time, however, they are a reminder that student perspectives—like the instruction they receive—is contingent on and informed by the contexts in which teaching and learning activities occur. Literacy practices shape the students who participate in them, but so, too, do students shape the literacy practices in which they engage.

In the field of literacy education, we tend to have little problem with this first claim—that instruction should, and indeed does, shape students. What often is overlooked is the second claim—that students should, and indeed must, shape instruction. It is this second claim that I focus on in the ensuing discussion of the implications of this study for practice and research. But first, a note about re-mediation in intervention settings.

**Re-mediation in Intervention Settings**

While conducting this study, I have time and again called into question the theoretical and practical soundness of a research agenda that focuses on re-mediation as it occurs in literacy intervention classrooms. Cole and Griffin’s (1983) foundational
example of reading re-mediation notwithstanding, at its core, re-mediation is a theory that can and should apply to all teaching and learning interactions. Moreover, my data suggest that many of the opportunities that the focal students benefited from in their literacy intervention classrooms are opportunities that would be valuable to all students, not just students who have been identified as struggling readers. Indeed, although re-mediation looked quite different in the two settings, the practices implemented in both classes encouraged students to consciously think about their own reading abilities, what it means to be a good reader, and why reading is important. These types of opportunities and metacognitive conversations about literacy in specific contexts and for specific purposes should be integrated into teaching and learning activities for all students across content areas.

**Implications for Practice**

Activity theorists posit that it is not enough to consider individual interactions without also attending to the larger contexts in which these interactions occur. At the same time that we begin to take seriously the claim that students—and their personal histories, identities, and individual needs—should shape instruction, it’s also important to consider the larger contexts that shape what happens in classrooms and schools. In our current high-stakes, test-driven educational environment in which so many students—up to 70% of adolescents, according to Biancarosa and Snow (2004)—are perceived to struggle with reading, it is unreasonable to assume that literacy intervention classes will become obsolete any time soon. Therefore, in the discussion that follows, I first address the administrative (district- and school-level) implications of my study as they apply to the current political climate in which literacy intervention classrooms continue to play a key role. Then, however, I move to a discussion of the pedagogical (classroom-level) implications of my study to address concerns that are relevant to all teaching and learning interactions. When taken seriously, I argue that these pedagogical considerations have the potential to change the nature of the conversation, from one that is framed around the idea of remediation for struggling readers to one that considers how to re-mediate instructional contexts in order to meet the needs of all students.

**Administrative Implications**

At the administrative level, the findings from this study have implications for how to (a) assess students’ individual literacy needs, (b) design curriculum that will best serve the needs of individual students, and (c) operationalize ways for students to move in and out of literacy intervention settings if and where they still exist.

**Assessing students’ individual literacy needs.** Northern High and Southern High both relied on standardized test scores in order to identify and, ultimately, place students into literacy intervention classes, and both Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung recognized the two major flaws in this approach. First, the CST test is not designed to determine students’ specific reading abilities and difficulties, much less the type of instruction necessary to address the underlying reasons behind individual students’ poor performance on it. Second, those underlying reasons for poor performance might be entirely unrelated to reading, as there is no guarantee that a student will perform to his or her potential on a mandated, standardized test like the CST.
Therefore, if schools and districts aim to continue the practice of identifying struggling readers, then it is imperative that they develop a more nuanced system in order to understand those students and the specific concerns that give rise to their status as poor readers. Johnston’s (2011) “prevention” or “instructional problem” (p. 519) vision for the optimal implementation of RTI is one example of what this kind of nuanced system might look like in practice. In this approach to RTI, teacher expertise is the most important factor in assessing what individual students need and then shaping instruction accordingly. What Johnston does not address explicitly in his vision, although it might underlie it, is the importance of understanding students’ personal histories with reading and identities as readers and how these factors contribute to what students appear to be able to do and not be able to do in the classroom.

**Designing curriculum that will best serve the needs of individual students.**
Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop served similar populations of students—at least as determined by students’ CST scores—in dramatically different ways. Therefore, in order to be more nuanced and strategic about what it means to assess students’ literacy needs, it is essential that schools and districts provide teachers with the resources necessary to understand and learn from the specific needs of their students so that they can tailor their curricula accordingly.

Neither Mr. Taylor nor Ms. Cheung operated under conditions that allowed them both freedom and support. Mr. Taylor had the freedom to tailor his curriculum to his students’ needs but not the support that might have allowed him to collaborate with other teachers and challenge his own assumptions about how best to serve his students. Ms. Cheung had the support that led to professional collaborations and discussions about how to serve her students but not the freedom to alter or re-envision the curriculum in any dramatic way. Moreover, to mandate a specific intervention program assumes that all students struggle with reading in the same way and, therefore, require the same instruction. This is not to say, however, that pre-designed curricula, like the University of Kansas’ Fusion Reading curriculum, are unhelpful. Rather, I argue that these resources should be made available for teachers to draw from when and where it is appropriate for specific students under specific conditions.

**Operationalizing ways for students to move in and out of intervention classes as appropriate.** As long as literacy intervention classes exist (and they seem to be here to stay, at least for now), there will always be students like Dennis and Tory who find themselves in a class that does not meet their needs. Although Tory was able to switch out of Reading Workshop early in the year, Dennis remained in Enhanced Reading despite having reading abilities and a personal relationship with reading that conflicted with the fact of his placement in the class. Indeed, my data indicate that the approach to re-mediation that Mr. Taylor offered his students was not the appropriate type of re-mediation for Dennis during his first semester of high school. Therefore, it is essential that schools and districts put in place mechanisms that make it possible and productive for teachers to advocate for students and students to advocate for themselves if a particular setting proves to be inappropriate for the student or antithetical to the goals of the class.
Pedagogical Implications

At the pedagogical level, the findings from this study have implications for the need to (a) attend to the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of different approaches to re-mediation, (b) approach reading as a tiered activity system, (c) consider the place of writing and other literacies in literacy instruction, and (c) emphasize the role of the student in shaping what re-mediation looks like in specific classrooms. It is through these pedagogical implications—located as they are in classrooms and between teachers and students—that true potential for re-mediation exists.

Attending to the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of different approaches to re-mediation. Although Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung are both English teachers in addition to literacy teachers, their instructional approaches are rooted in different theoretical and pedagogical traditions. The reading curriculum that Mr. Taylor developed for Enhanced Reading was informed by his experiences as a student in a Master’s and credentialing program that placed great emphasis on the sociocultural work of teaching in the discipline of English. In contrast, the curriculum that Ms. Cheung implemented in Reading Workshop was informed by her role as a SIM literacy coach and professional developer as well as her training as a Fusion Reading teacher. Moreover, the strategies that underpin the Fusion Reading class were originally developed for use in special education settings. They were later adapted and expanded for use with students in general education settings. In light of the very different theoretical and pedagogical traditions that underpin instruction in Enhanced Reading and Reading Workshop, it is critical that teachers interrogate how these underlying premises interact with students’ personal histories and identities as readers and shape what re-mediation looks like in their classrooms.

Approaching reading as a tiered activity system. In addition to the different theoretical and pedagogical traditions that informed Mr. Taylor’s and Ms. Cheung’s instructional approaches, their respective curricula focused on different tiers of the reading activity system. Mr. Taylor was most interested in reading as a whole activity, with strategies taking a backseat to the act of reading itself. In contrast, Ms. Cheung focused her attention on the strategies that underpin the activity of reading and, at times, this emphasis on mastering strategies overshadowed the authentic reading of which the strategies might have been a part. Emphasizing reading itself as well as how to be a strategic reader are both essential, and attending to one at the expense of the other is to miss an essential piece of what is involved in reading and comprehending text. These findings suggest that a productive way to design future literacy curricula might be to view reading skills and strategies not as ends in themselves but as tiers within a larger activity system that positions reading as a whole activity rather than a series of sub-skills and strategies.

Considering the place of writing and other literacies in literacy instruction. Enhanced Reading and Reading workshop both privileged reading over other types of literacy practices. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Cheung were equally conflicted about this focus on reading at the expense of writing, in particular, and their struggles to separate the two calls into question the underlying assumption that reading can and should be taught in isolation from other literacy practices, which includes but is certainly not limited to writing. Indeed, this dilemma should also extend to an interrogation of the relationship...
between reading and the many other ways of being literate that students bring to the classroom. By expanding their definitions of what it means to be literate, teachers can begin to imagine and design approaches to literacy instruction that take into account the multiple, nontraditional literacy practices that they and their students bring with them to the classroom.

**Emphasizing the role of the student in shaping what re-mediation looks like in specific classrooms.** Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is essential that teachers take seriously the critical role that students play in shaping what re-mediation looks like in classrooms across content areas. This last concern is one that is at the core of this study. As such, it informs all of the implications for practice that I have discussed in this section. It means that teachers need to provide multiple and ongoing opportunities for students to bring their own histories, identities, and literacy practices into their classrooms. It also involves paying close attention to the individual needs of students and how those needs might interact with the personal histories and identities that they bring with them to school.

**Implications for Future Research**

As a researcher, the concept of re-mediation is compelling because it is a window into a different way of envisioning how to approach research in education, in general, and literacy education, in particular. That is, it targets the activity as the unit of analysis with an eye toward how it might change to accommodate the student, rather than targeting the student and how he or she might change to accommodate the instruction. Adding a theory of identity to the concept of re-mediation repositions the student yet again within the activity by incorporating his or her personal histories and identities into the activity of reading. Thus, the focus of the research becomes one of understanding how these various factors mediate students’ reading and learning.

The perspectives of all of the students in this study, but particularly those articulated and enacted by Victoria and Lily in Chapter Five, are a challenge to teachers and researchers alike to take seriously the longer-term outcomes of what we teach and study. It is imperative that future research investigates these outcomes, in terms of how they impact students’ reading habits, abilities, and metacognitive awareness as well as how they shape students’ identities as readers and students over time and across contexts both in and out of school. In this project for future research, it is equally essential that the active role that students play in teaching and learning interactions be a primary area of study.

At the same time, future research must also attend to the specific contexts in which teachers teach and students learn and how these contexts inform students’ perspectives. It is not enough to simply ask students questions, and future research that highlights students’ perspectives also needs to understand those perspectives in context and over time. Moreover, simply focusing on understanding the perspectives of students is not a guarantee that future approaches to literacy instruction will meet the needs of all students. Rather, as we move forward in our teaching and research agendas, it is imperative that we take into account the symbiotic relationship between activities and identities and how each informs and shapes the other.
References


**Literary Works**


Appendix A

Student Interview Protocols

Interview #1
1. What was the last thing you read that you really enjoyed reading?
2. You can choose to read a lot of different things. Take a look at these different reading materials. If you could choose any of these, which one would you choose to read first? (See materials.)
   a. What made you pick (text) first/second/third?
   b. Have you read (text) before, or did you just think you might like to read it?
   c. Which one would you pick second? (Repeat a. and b.)
   d. What would be your third choice? (Repeat a. and b.)
3. What other things do you like to read that aren’t here?
   a. What do you like about (text)?
   b. How do you find (text)?
   c. Where do you read (text)?
   d. Do other kids you know also read (text)?
   e. Do you ever read (text) with other people? What kinds of people (e.g., friends, teachers, relatives)?
   f. Do you ever talk about (text) with other people? What kinds of people (e.g., friends, teachers, relatives)?
   (Repeat for all texts mentioned.)
4. What kinds of things (texts/genres) do you dislike reading? What do you dislike about them? Do you read them anyway?
5. What sorts of things are easiest to read? What makes (text/genre) easy to read? [Probe for differences between content and reading level.]
6. What sorts of things are hardest to read?
   a. What makes (text/genre) hard to read? [Probe for differences between content and reading level.]
   b. What do you do when something is hard to read? [Probes: reread, look up word(s), ask a teacher.]
7. How often do you read something that you enjoy reading?
   a. Can you give me an example of one of the things that you enjoy reading?
   b. What do you like about reading (text)?
   c. What else do you enjoy reading?
8. If I were to ask one of your family members if you like reading, what would he/she say? Why do you think he/she would say that?
9. If someone was spying on you reading, what would they see?
10. What do you think somebody needs to know or be able to do to be a good reader?
11. Who do you know is a good reader? How do you know that he/she is a good reader?
12. What is your earliest memory of seeing another person reading?
13. What is your earliest memory of yourself reading?
14. What’s your earliest memory of learning to read?

10 The following questions were adapted from Moje’s (2006) Literacy Practices Interview.
15. What’s your favorite memory about reading?
16. What’s your worst memory about reading?
17. How are you different as a reader now as compared to when you were younger?
18. What kinds of things do you write:
   a. In school? (Probes: response to literature, book reviews, summaries, journals, answers to questions, essays, poetry, short stories, class notes, science labs, notes to friends)
   b. For what purpose to you write (text/genre)? (Repeat for all text/genres mentioned.)
   c. Outside of school? (Probes: journal entries, poetry, short stories, emails/letters to friends, instant messages, posts to social networks, text messages, music)
   d. For what purpose to you write (text/genre)? (Repeat for all text/genres mentioned.)
19. What sorts of things are easiest to write? What makes (text/genre) easy to write?
20. What sorts of things are hardest to write?
   a. What makes (text/genre) hard to write?
   b. What do you do when something is hard to write? [Probes: edit, ask a friend, ask a teacher.]
21. How often do you write something that you enjoy writing?
   a. Can you give me an example of one of the things that you enjoy writing?
   b. What do you like about writing (text/genre)?
   c. What else do you enjoy writing?
22. If I were to ask one of your family members if you like writing, what would he/she say? Why do you think he/she would say that?
23. Who reads the things you write? [Probes: parent, teacher, friend.]
24. What makes you really want to write something?
25. What makes you really not want to write something?
26. If someone was spying on you writing, what would they see?
27. What do you think somebody needs to know or be able to do to be a good writer?
28. Who do you know is a good writer? How do you know that he/she is a good writer?
29. What is your earliest memory of seeing another person writing?
30. What is your earliest memory of yourself writing?
31. What’s your earliest memory of learning to write?
32. What’s your favorite memory about writing?
33. What’s your worst memory about writing?
34. How are you different as a writer now as compared to when you were younger?

Interview #2
1. Could you describe a typical school day?
2. What classes do you take? [If specific classes are not mentioned while answering question one.]
3. Of all the classes that you just mentioned (list them), which class is your favorite?
4. Could you describe what happened in (class mentioned) today/yesterday, from the time you got to class to the time you left?
5. What are some things you like about (class mentioned)? [Probe: teacher or subject/content?]
6. What does a student need to know or be able to do to be successful in this class?
7. What do you think your teacher would say a student needs to know or be able to do to be successful in this class?
8. What reading happens during this class or for homework?
   a. Can you give me an example?
   b. For what purpose do you think your teacher asks you to read (text/genre)?
   c. Can you give me another example?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
9. What writing happens during this class or for homework?
   a. Can you give me an example?
   b. For what purpose do you think your teacher asks you to write (text/genre)?
   c. Can you give me another example?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
10. [If a core class is not mentioned for question three] What is your favorite core/subject-area class?
   (Repeat questions 4-9 for additional favorite classes mentioned.)
11. Of all the classes that you just mentioned (list them again), which class is your least favorite?
12. Could you describe what happened in (class mentioned) today/yesterday, from the time you got to class to the time you left?
13. What are some things you dislike about (class mentioned)? [Probe: teacher or subject/content?]
14. What does a student need to know or be able to do to be successful in this class?
15. What do you think your teacher would say a student needs to know or be able to do to be successful in this class?
16. What reading happens during this class or for homework?
   a. Can you give me an example?
   b. For what purpose do you think your teacher asks you to read (text/genre)?
   c. Can you give me another example?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
17. What writing happens during this class or for homework?
   a. Can you give me an example?
   b. For what purpose do you think your teacher asks you to write (text/genre)?
   c. Can you give me another example?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
18. [If a core class is not mentioned for question eight] What is your least favorite core/subject-area class?
   (Repeat questions 12-17 for additional least favorite classes mentioned.)
19. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between (favorite core class) and (least favorite core class)? (Repeat for any other favorite/least favorite classes mentioned.)
20. Now, thinking back over all of middle school and ninth grade, I’d like you to think about your favorite class ever. What are some things that you remember liking about this class? [Probe: teacher or subject/content?]
21. Thinking back over all of middle school and ninth grade, I’d like you to think about your least favorite class ever. What are some things that you remember disliking about this class? [Probe: teacher or subject/content?]

22. Who do you know who is a good student? How do you know that he/she is a good student?

23. If you were a teacher and one of your students said he/she was having trouble understanding the reading assignments in your class, what would you tell him/her to do?

24. If you were a teacher and one of your students told you he/she was having trouble doing the writing assignments for your class, what would you tell him/her to do?

25. Suppose a new student asked you what teachers he/she should request next year. 
   a. What teachers would you recommend?
   b. What is it about this teacher that would make you recommend him/her? (Repeat for all teachers mentioned.)
   c. What teachers would you tell the new student to avoid?
   d. What is it about this teacher that would make you tell the new student to avoid him/her? (Repeat for all teachers mentioned.)
   e. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between (answer to a) and (answer to b)? (Repeat for all teachers mentioned.)

26. In your opinion, what are some of the things that teachers do that make it easier for you to learn during class?
   a. Can you think of an example of a time when a teacher did something that helped you learn?
   b. Can you think of another example?

27. And what are some of the things that teachers do that make it harder for you to learn during class?
   a. Can you think of an example of a time when a teacher did something that made it hard for you to learn?
   b. Can you think of another example?

28. In your opinion, what does it mean for a teacher to be supportive of you? Of the teachers we have talked about today, which of them are most like this (i.e., most supportive of you)?

29. Who were your eighth grade teachers? Your eighth-grade counselor? Who is your high school counselor?

Interview #3

1. Give student a copy of the survey (see Appendix E) and go over it with him/her.

2. In your opinion, what are your greatest strengths in the classroom?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when you noticed this strength? (Repeat for all strengths mentioned.)
   b. Where does this strength come from? (Probe for family, friends, teachers, and repeat for all strengths mentioned.)
   b. What other strengths do you posses?

3. What do you think you struggle with most in your classes?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when you struggled in this way? (Repeat for all struggles mentioned.)
   b. What other things do you struggle with in your classes?
c. What do you do when you struggle in your classes? (Probe for where they get help—family, friends, teachers, etc.)

4. In your opinion, how have you changed as a reader over the past year?
5. What do you think somebody needs to know or be able to do to be a good reader?
6. Are the people you live with (mom, dad, siblings, other relatives, friends) good readers? Do they help you with your reading? (Probe for more background on the student’s home life.)

7. In your opinion, how have you changed as a writer over the past year?
8. What do you think someone needs to know or be able to do to be a good writer?
9. Are the people you live with (mom, dad, siblings, other relatives, friends) good writers? Do they help you with your writing? (Probe for more background on the student’s home life.)

10. In your opinion, how have you changed as a student over the past year?
11. What do you think someone needs to know or be able to do to be a good student?
12. What do teachers do that help you to be a good student?
13. What do you wish teachers did that would help you to be a better student?

14. Suppose an eighth grader asked you if he/she should take Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading next year. What would you tell him/her?

15. Of all the things you learned in Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading this year, what has been the most useful to you this year?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when it was useful? (Probe for usefulness in other classes.)
   b. Can you give me another example?
   c. Why do you think your teacher had you do this as part of the class?

16. Of all the things you learned in Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading this year, what will be most useful to you next year, as a sophomore?
   a. Can you give me an example of when it will be useful?
   b. Can you give me another example?
   c. (If different from the answer to question 15:) Why do you think your teacher had you do this as part of the class?

17. Of all the things you learned in Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading this year, what has been the least useful to you this year?
   a. Can you explain why it wasn’t useful? (Probe for usefulness in other classes.)
   b. Why do you think your teacher had you do this as part of the class?

18. Of all the things you learned in Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading this year, what will be least useful to you next year, as a sophomore?
   a. Can you explain why it won’t be useful?
   b. (If different from the answer to question 17:) Why do you think your teacher had you do this as part of the class?

19. What piece of work are you most proud of from this year’s Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading class?

20. If you could give one piece of advice to the new Reading Workshop teacher/Mr. Taylor about how to improve next year’s class, what would it be?

21. Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading is currently only offered to ninth graders. Do you think there should be classes like this in other grades, as well?
22. If you could give your sophomore-year teachers one piece of advice as people working with you next year, what would it be?
23. What are your plans for the summer? (*Probe* for plans to do any reading and/or writing.)
24. What do you hope to do after high school? (*Probe* for the place of reading and writing in these future goals.)
25. How can I reach you in case I have any follow-up questions?
Appendix B
Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Could you describe a typical day in (name of class)?
2. How long have you been teaching this course?
3. How many students are in the class I observed?
4. What is the history of this class? How did it begin?
5. In your opinion, what’s one of the best parts about teaching (name of class)? What are some other good parts?
6. In your opinion, what’s one of the hardest parts about teaching (name of class)? What are some other difficult parts?
7. Can you think of an example of a time when a student in your class surprised you? What was so surprising about the situation?
8. What does a student need to know or be able to do to be successful in your class?
9. What do you do if a student is struggling in your class?
10. Today (or yesterday) in class, how did you divide up the class? [Draw a circle on a sheet of paper to represent the 60- or 90-minute class.] Is this typically how you divide up the class?
11. How important is the ability to read in your class?
12. What reading happens during your class or for homework?
   a. Can you give me an example?
   b. For what purpose do you ask students to read (text/genre)?
   c. Can you give me another example?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
13. Today (or yesterday) in class, what percentage of time do you think students spent reading?
   a. What kinds of reading did they do?
   b. For what purpose?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
14. What do you think someone needs to know or be able to do to be a good reader?
15. If one of your students told you he/she was having trouble understanding the reading assignments in your class, what would you tell him/her to do?
16. How important is the ability to write in your class?
17. What writing happens during your class or for homework?
   a. Can you give me an example?
   b. For what purpose do you ask students to write (text/genre)?
   c. Can you give me another example?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)
18. Today (or yesterday) in class, what percentage of time do you think students spent writing?
   a. What kinds of writing did they do?
   b. For what purpose?
   (Repeat b. for all texts mentioned.)

Questions in boldface apply to all teachers. Other questions apply to literacy teachers only. For the literacy teachers, questions were asked over three interview sessions; for other teachers, questions were asked during one interview session.
19. What do you think someone needs to know or be able to do to be a good writer?
20. If one of your students told you he/she was having trouble understanding the *writing* assignments in your class, what would you tell him/her to do?
21. What are some of the things that you notice students excelling at in your class?
   a. Can you think of an example of a particular student who excelled in this way?
   b. Can you describe this student’s success to me?
      (Repeat a. and b. for each type of success mentioned.)
22. What are some of the things that you notice students struggling with most in your class?
   a. Can you think of an example of a particular student who struggled in this way?
   b. Can you describe this student’s difficulties to me?
   c. What do you do when he/she struggles in this way?
      (Repeat a. and b. for each type of struggle mentioned.)
23. If a new student asked you what to expect in this class, what would you tell him/her?
24. I’d like to talk briefly about each student in your class. Let’s start with *(name of student)*. What are some of his/her strengths in the classroom? Struggles in the classroom? What role do you think/hope this class will play for *(name of student)* this year?
25. How did student X get placed in your class? [Probe: teacher recommendation(s), grades, testing data, other?] (Repeat for all focal students.)
26. In your opinion, what are/were *(name of student)*’s greatest strengths in the classroom?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when you noticed this strength?
      (Repeat for all strengths mentioned.)
   b. From your perspective, what other strengths does *(name of student)* possess?
27. What do you think *(name of student)* struggles/struggled with most in your class?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when he/she struggled in this way?
   b. What other things does/did *(name of student)* struggle with in your class?
   c. What do you do when he/she struggles?
28. What role do you think this class has played for *(name of student)* this year?
29. If you could have given me just one piece of advice as someone working with *(name of student)* this year, what would it be?
30. From your perspective, what is the role of ninth grade literacy classes at *(name of school)*?
31. How long have you been teaching?
32. What grade levels have you taught?
33. What other classes are you currently teaching?
34. Who or what has influenced your approach to teaching?
35. In your opinion, what’s the most rewarding part about being a teacher?
36. In your opinion, what’s the hardest part about being a teacher?
37. In your opinion, what’s the hardest part about being a student?
38. What types of students enroll in these classes? How are they identified?
39. What are some of the primary goals of these classes? Other goals?
40. Have you heard of Response to Intervention (RTI)? If so, how do these classes fit into the RTI framework?
41. What happens to a student who is successful in his/her ninth grade literacy class?
42. What happens to a student who is unsuccessful in his/her ninth grade literacy class?
43. If you could change or adapt the current structure of the ninth grade literacy class, what changes or adaptations would you recommend?
44. Is there any data on the success rates of students who take the ninth grade literacy class?
45. Is there anyone else I should talk to in order to learn more about these classes and the students who take them?
46. Are there any questions you think I should ask in the survey and/or in my end-of-year interviews with students?
47. We’ve already talked about how (name of student) got placed in your class. Do you have any specific data on him/her that I could have? [Probe: correspondence from eighth grade teachers, test scores (CST, GRADE), other data sources]
48. From your perspective now, at the end of the school year, what are (name of student)’s greatest strengths in the classroom?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when you noticed this strength?
   b. Where do you think this strength comes from?
   c. What other strengths does (name of student) posses?
49. From your perspective now, at the end of the school year, what do you think (name of student) struggled with most in your class?
   a. Can you give me an example of a time when he/she struggled in this way?
   b. What do you do when he/she struggles in this way?
   c. What other things did (name of student) struggle with in your class?
50. [If student has an IEP or 504 plan:] I know that (name of student) has an IEP. As his/her teacher, what kind of information have you received about his/her disabilities and accommodations?
   a. Has this information influenced your approach to instructing (name of student) in the classroom?
   b. Can you share some of this information with me?
51. In your opinion, how has (name of student) changed as a reader over the past year?
52. More generally, how has (name of student) changed as a student over the past year?
53. Of all the things (name of student) learned in Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading this year, what do you think has been or will be the most useful to him/her? Why do you think this has been or will be the most useful?
54. Of all the things (name of student) learned in Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading this year, what has been or will be the least useful to him/her? Why do you think this has been or will be the least useful?
55. What piece of work do you think is most indicative of (name of student)’s performance in this class? May I have a copy of this work?
56. What, if anything, do you know about (name of student)’s parents/family? What kind of influence do they have on his/her academic life?
57. How long have you been teaching, and what made you want to be a teacher? [Probe for reasons he/she decided to teach struggling readers.]
58. Who or what has influenced your approach to teaching? [Probe for teaching reading, specifically.]
59. How do you identify yourself in terms of race/ethnicity?
60. Do you speak any languages other than English?
61. Could I get my focal students’ midterm grades from you now? And can you send me their final grades when you have them? [ALSO, if not already obtained earlier in the interview: Focal students’ demographic information and test scores.]
62. Do you have any suggestions for what to copy of my focal students’ work?
63. Could I get copies of the anonymous end-of-year survey you ask students to complete, for all classes?
64. Is it okay if I contact you over the summer or next year in case I have any follow-up questions?
Appendix C
Parent Interview Protocol

1. Thinking back over the years since (name of student) started school, what do you remember most about his/her experiences as a student?
2. Could you tell me about what you remember about how (name of student) learned to read?
3. What kinds of things does he/she read?
4. Could you tell me a little bit about what you remember about how (name of student) learned to write?
5. What kinds of things does he/she write?
6. Could you describe a typical school day in the life of (name of student)?
7. Suppose the parent of an incoming ninth grader was to ask you what classes he/she should enroll his/her child in next year. (Probe specifically for information about the reading class.)
   a. What classes/teachers would you recommend?
   b. What classes/teachers would you tell him/her to avoid?
   c. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between (answer to a) and (answer to b)? (Repeat for all teachers/classes mentioned.)
8. In your opinion, what are some of the things that teachers do that make it easier for (name of student) to learn during class?
   a. Can you think of an example of a time when a teacher did something that helped him/her learn?
   b. Can you think of another example?
9. And what are some of the things that teachers do that make it harder for (name of student) to learn during class?
   a. Can you think of an example of a time when a teacher did something that made it hard for him/her to learn?
   b. Can you think of another example?
10. In your opinion, what are (name of student)’s greatest strengths?
    a. Can you give me an example of a time when you noticed this strength? (Repeat for all strengths mentioned.)
    b. From your perspective, what other strengths does (name of student) posses?
11. What do you think (name of student) struggles with most?
    a. Can you give me an example of a time when he/she struggled in this way?
    b. What do you do when you notice him/her struggling?
    b. What other things does (name of student) struggle with?
12. If you could give just one piece of advice to the teachers who will be working with (name of student) next year, what would it be?
Appendix D

Administrator and Counselor Interview Protocol

1. Could you tell me a little bit about the role of ninth grade literacy classes at (name of school)?
2. What types of students enroll in these classes? How are they identified?
3. What are some of the primary goals of these classes? Other goals?
4. What is the role of Response to Intervention (RTI) at your school?
5. How do these classes fit into the RTI framework?
6. What happens to a student who is successful in his/her ninth grade literacy class?
7. What happens to a student who is unsuccessful in his/her ninth grade literacy class?
8. If you could change or adapt the current structure of the ninth grade literacy class, what changes or adaptations would you recommend?
9. Is there any data on the success rates of students who take the ninth grade literacy class?
10. Is there anyone else I should talk to in order to learn more about these classes and the students who take them?
Appendix E
Student Survey

Dear Student: There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am asking for your opinions only. Thank you for taking this survey.

1. Of all the classes that you are taking this year, which class is your MOST favorite?

2. Of all the classes listed below that you are taking this year, which of these classes is your MOST favorite? (Pick only one)

☐ English  ☐ Science
☐ History  ☐ Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading
☐ Math

3. Why is this class your MOST favorite? (Check all that apply)

☐ I like the subject.
☐ I like the teacher.
☐ I like my classmates.
☐ I like the work we do in this class.
☐ I like my grade in this class.
☐ Other (please tell me other reasons why this class is your most favorite): _________________

4. How interesting is this class to you?

Not interesting  1  2  3  Very interesting  4

5. How hard do you work in this class?

Not hard  1  2  3  Very hard  4

6. How easy is this class for you?

Very difficult  1  2  3  Very easy  4

7. How much reading do you do in this class and for homework?

A little  1  2  3  A lot  4

8. How much writing do you do in this class and for homework?

A little  1  2  3  A lot  4

9. What does a student need to know or be able to do to be successful in this class?
10. Of all the classes that you are taking this year, which class is your LEAST favorite?

11. Of all the classes listed below that you are taking this year, which of these classes is your LEAST favorite? (Pick only one)

☐ English  ☐ Science  
 ☐ History  ☐ Reading Workshop/Enhanced Reading  
 ☐ Math

12. Why is this class your LEAST favorite? (Check all that apply)

☐ I don’t like the subject.  
☐ I don’t like the teacher.  
☐ I don’t like my classmates.  
☐ I don’t like the work we do in this class.  
☐ I don’t like my grade in this class.  
☐ Other (please tell me other reasons why this class is your LEAST favorite): __________

13. How interesting is this class to you?

Not interesting  Very interesting  
1 2 3 4

14. How hard do you work in this class?

Not hard  Very hard  
1 2 3 4

15. How easy is this class for you?

Very difficult  Very easy  
1 2 3 4

16. How much reading do you do in this class and for homework?

A little  A lot  
1 2 3 4

17. How much writing do you do in this class and for homework?

A little  A lot  
1 2 3 4

18. What does a student need to know or be able to do to be successful in this class?

19. Teachers are HELPFUL to me when they…

20. Teachers are UNHELPFUL to me when they…

21. What is your date of birth?
22. What sex/gender are you?

☐ Male  
☐ Female  

23. What language is spoken in your home?

☐ English  
☐ Spanish  
☐ Other (please tell me what other language(s) you speak in your home):  

24. Do you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

☐ Yes  
☐ No