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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

VOICES OF STRIVING ELEMENTARY READERS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE ENHANCEMENT
OF STRUGGLING READER RESEARCH
THROUGH PORTRAITURE
METHODOLOGY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Roland K. Schendel

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology
Applied Statistics and Research Methods

December, 2009

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This Dissertation by: Roland K. Schendel

Entitled: *Voices of Striving Elementary Readers: An Exploration of the Enhancement of Struggling Reader Research through Portraiture Methodology*

Has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology, Program of Applied Statistics and Research Methods

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

Maria K. E. Lahman, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Michael F. Opitz, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Lisa Rue, Ph.D., Committee Member

Kathleen Fahey, Ph.D., Faculty Representative

Date of Dissertation Defense _____

Accepted by the Graduate School

Robbyn R. Wacker, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice President for Research
Dean of Graduate School & International Admissions

ABSTRACT

Schendel, Roland K. *Voices of Striving Elementary Readers: An Exploration of the Enhancement of Struggling Reader Research through Portraiture Methodology*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2009.

This investigation was conducted to determine the value of using self-reports to elicit participant views of their reading struggles and to explore the potential benefits of using portraiture methodology as a means for illuminating the goodness inherent to struggling reader experiences in school. Three fourth grade participants were purposefully selected from one public and two charter elementary schools.

Approximately three hours of interviews and 20 hours of observations were completed to collect data from each student over a 20 week period. With the participating students' teachers, approximately two hours of interview data were collected. Artifact gathering and the researcher journal were also used to collect data. The central stories of participants were represented through narratives, found poetry, and participant created poetry.

The significance of this study was revealed in the understanding gained concerning the use of portraiture methodology and the nature of struggling elementary readers. The use of Portraiture methodology resulted in open access to the classroom environment, acceptance by all participants, and immediate changes in teaching behaviors with increased attention to student perspectives. Furthermore, by adhering to student self-reports, several key understandings associated with the persistent struggles of

elementary readers were revealed. It was determined that teachers and struggling readers hold differing views of the definition and importance of reading. The readers struggled in reading as it was defined by their teachers. They struggled to adequately perform reading tasks controlled by their teachers due to the contexts of those tasks and the materials used. When tasks honored material of interest to the student, authentic contexts for reading, and individualized purpose, the readers displayed proficient and advanced reading performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With genuine appreciation, I would like to thank the participants of this study. The reception and interest displayed by administrators, teachers, and parents were generous contributions to my understanding and celebration of the immense efforts expended on behalf of learners. I dearly appreciate the participating students of this

study. They have taught me how to be a reflexive researcher and a better teacher. They have taught me the value of student voice.

I would like to thank the University of Northern Colorado community. The nurturing learning environment prepared me to conduct and complete this study with dignity.

I would like to thank my family for expressing their interest and their constant support of my educational ambitions. I thank my parents for being incredible models of respect, kindness, hard work, and diligence. They have molded me into the person that I have become and deserve credit for the beauty that I strive to inspire in the world.

Above all, this accomplishment is credited to my wife and children. With incredible appreciation, I thank my wife, Michaela. Her love, support, and encouragement have fueled my fire to improve, to succeed. She is incredible. I thank my children, Ryer and Lindrey, for their emphatic interest in my passion for learning. Their declarations of wanting to pursue doctorates for themselves made me realize that I have continued this journey with integrity and have passed on the joy of learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

| | |
|---|----|
| I. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Background..... | 1 |
| Rationale..... | 5 |
| Need for the Study..... | 7 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 8 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 9 |
| Research Questions..... | 9 |
| Significance of the Study..... | 10 |
| II. LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 11 |
| Introduction..... | 11 |
| Developmental Reading..... | 11 |
| Nonstage Models of Reading Development..... | 12 |
| Stage Models of Reading Development..... | 13 |
| Gray's stages..... | 13 |
| Gates' stages..... | 14 |
| Chall's stages..... | 19 |
| Struggling Readers..... | 21 |
| Metacognition and Reading..... | 27 |
| Researching Youth..... | 29 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Observing Youth..... | 29 |
| Interviewing Youth..... | 32 |
| Issues that Surround Interviews with Youth..... | 33 |
| Ethical Considerations for Researching Youth..... | 36 |
| Portraiture Methodology..... | 39 |
| Concluding Summary..... | 42 |
| III. METHODOLOGY..... | 43 |
| Introduction..... | 43 |
| Epistemology: Constructivism..... | 45 |
| Theoretical Perspectives..... | 47 |
| Developmental Theory..... | 47 |
| Social Cognitive Theory..... | 48 |
| Critical Literacy Theory..... | 50 |
| Portraiture as a Theoretical Perspective..... | 51 |
| Methodology..... | 52 |
| Portraiture as a Methodology..... | 52 |
| Methods..... | 54 |
| Terrain..... | 54 |
| Actors..... | 55 |
| Data Collection..... | 58 |
| Voice as Witness: Individual, Group and..... | 59 |
| Classroom Reading Activity Observations | |
| Listening for Voice: Interviewing Striving readers. | 59 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Physical Landscape: Artifact Gathering..... | 60 |
| Voice as Interpretation: Researcher Journal..... | 60 |
| Data Analysis..... | 61 |
| The Process..... | 62 |
| Emergent Themes..... | 62 |
| Shaping the Final Portrait..... | 63 |
| Additional Methodological Considerations..... | 64 |
| Researcher Voice..... | 64 |
| Gaining Access and Building Rapport..... | 64 |
| Ethics..... | 65 |
| Procedural ethics..... | 66 |
| Situational ethics..... | 66 |
| Ethical Considerations for Researching Youth..... | 67 |
| Process consent..... | 68 |
| Responsive ethics..... | 68 |
| Relational ethics..... | 68 |
| Reflexive ethics..... | 69 |
| Criteria for appropriate practice..... | 70 |
| Trustworthiness..... | 71 |
| Analysis Procedure..... | 72 |
| Shaping Participant Portraits..... | 72 |
| Procedural Steps..... | 73 |
| Findings..... | 75 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| | Concluding Summary..... | 76 |
| IV. | RESEARCHER’S PORTRAIT..... | 77 |
| | Introduction..... | 77 |
| | My View of the Learner..... | 78 |
| | My Voice..... | 78 |
| | Parent Voice..... | 80 |
| | Student Voice..... | 83 |
| V. | LIZZY’S PORTRAIT..... | 85 |
| | A View of Lizzy..... | 85 |
| | Lizzy’s View..... | 87 |
| | Lizzy’s Understanding of Reading..... | 94 |
| | Lizzy’s Achievements..... | 98 |
| VI. | DANIEL’S PORTRAIT..... | 101 |
| | A View of Daniel..... | 101 |
| | Daniel’s View..... | 102 |
| | Daniel’s Understanding of Reading..... | 108 |
| | Daniel’s Achievements..... | 112 |
| VII. | EMMA’S PORTRAIT..... | 114 |
| | A View of Emma..... | 114 |
| | Emma’s View..... | 115 |
| | Emma’s Understanding of Reading..... | 125 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Emma’s Achievements..... | 127 |
| VIII SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS. | 130 |
| IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | |
| Overview..... | 130 |
| Summary and Discussion of Findings..... | 131 |
| Understanding the Purpose of Reading..... | 132 |
| Appropriately Defining Good Reading..... | 133 |
| Answering Countless Questions Asked..... | 134 |
| By their Teachers Following Reading | |
| Locating Books of Interest..... | 135 |
| Looking Forward to Reading Texts of which..... | 135 |
| they have Little or No Background Knowledge | |
| Reading Unfamiliar Texts Aloud..... | 136 |
| Showing their Skills on Formal and..... | 137 |
| Informal Reading Assessments | |
| Conclusion..... | 138 |
| Self-Reported Experiences of “Struggling”..... | 138 |
| Readers | |
| How do “struggling” readers define..... | 139 |
| Themselves as readers in school? | |
| What control if any may striving readers see. | 140 |
| themselves having with regard to their reading | |
| acquisition in school? | |
| What do striving readers view as beneficial... | 141 |
| (i.e., goodness) to their reading improvement? | |
| How might striving readers guide their..... | 141 |
| reading acquisition processes? | |
| Value of Portraiture Methodology..... | 142 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Implications..... | 146 |
| Implications for Teachers..... | 146 |
| Policy Implications..... | 148 |
| Recommendations for Further Research..... | 150 |
| Three Pivotal Follow-Ups to this Study..... | 150 |
| REFERENCES..... | 152 |
| APPENDIX A: Definition of Terms..... | 168 |
| APPENDIX B: Permission to Conduct Research..... | 171 |
| APPENDIX C: Sample of the Coding process..... | 173 |
| APPENDIX D: Tentative Research Schedule..... | 175 |
| APPENDIX E: Initial Teacher Interview..... | 178 |
| APPENDIX F: Student Interview Script..... | 180 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Frustrating doesn't even begin to describe my feelings as a teacher of reading. My third graders continued to have reading struggles despite my diligence. Caught up in a race to meet their needs, it happened. I chose to listen to feedback offered by a few of my students, Bailey and Clifford.

"The book just gets in the way of our discussion!" exclaims Bailey.

Clifford continues, "Too many people just flip through their book trying to find something to talk about. I think we should just talk about the reading and how we feel about it."

Skeptical, I took a step back to observe the outcome of a student defined (i.e., closed book) and driven (i.e., passionate listening and speaking) reading response activity. Their insightful discussion, a wave of frigid water in my face, was shocking. I realized that many experts of reading education sat before me. I couldn't help but wonder aloud, "What other struggling reader insights did they hold?"

Researchers have spent insurmountable time inquiring about struggling readers. Some have designed and conducted quantitative studies employing questionnaires and reading score analyses to investigate the effects of different forms of instruction on the

reading growth of those who appear to have difficulty acquiring reading (McCormick & Braithwaite, 2008). For instance, Pichert and Anderson (1977) used comprehension test scores and questionnaires to analyze reading response patterns concluding that readers' level of schemata determines their understanding of a text. In addition, by quantifying her observations of comprehension instruction, Durkin (1979) found that students must be explicitly taught comprehension skills and strategies. In yet a third example, Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, and Seltzer (1994) analyzed the treatment effects of intervention programs on reading test scores to determine that instructional emphasis, individual instruction, and teacher training are factors in reading success.

Likewise, many qualitative researchers have investigated struggling readers. Several have designed and conducted studies to elicit struggling readers' behaviors and their perceptions of the reading process by using observation and interview methods (Almasi, Garas-York, & Shanahan, 2006). Freire (1970) utilized interviews to recognize that reading was a skill embedded in the backgrounds and characteristics of the individual. Consequently, reading instruction should be reflective of the experiences and views of the learner. Employing observational methods of inquiry, Gaskins (1984) determined that poor reading is not the result of an isolated problem. Rather, a reader's success is often hindered by multiple causes that require identification and resolve. Furthermore, an understanding of learner's perspectives of the reading process, elicited through interviews, can guide teachers to nurture readers who are both positive and successful (Moller, 1999). Taken together, the findings of quantitative and qualitative researchers have brought greater understanding of struggling readers and the instructional practices best suited for them.

Similar to these researchers, as an elementary classroom teacher, I spent much of my time attempting to enhance the abilities of *my* struggling readers. I spent time reading professional books attempting to seek out answers to questions such as the best forms of reading instruction for struggling readers, how to involve them in literature discussions, how to provide opportunities for choosing their own reading materials, how to structure the role of independent reading within the school day, and how to detect and use the strengths of struggling readers to teach them something they needed to know. Although helpful, my reading provided more questions than answers.

I also discovered a mismatch between many of the explanations of theory and practice and what was occurring in my classroom. Using a student defined reading response activity, for example, I experienced first hand that students had much to say about the texts they were reading. But in order to reap the rewards from student voices, I realized that I had to value their voices. In Chris VanAllsburg's *Polar Express*, Timmy cannot make the bell from Santa's sleigh chime merely by going through the motions of shaking it. He has to believe to hear! This is also the case with student voice. The clarity, insight, and potential of student voice can only resonate when the teacher/researcher believes, hence listens for and to it.

Historically, some educators have embraced the notion of valuing the student's voice (i.e., self-reporting), using it to better understand how to assist them in becoming proficient readers (Goodman, 1989). As far back as 1846, the insightful power of the learner's voice was embraced by John Russell Webb resulting in the word method for teaching reading (Smith, 2002). In another case shared by Barnard (1859) involving a Pestalozzian master in the midst of teaching words, the *child's* words proved to have had

the greatest impact on instruction. The suggestion of the child inspired the use of real objects to be used for teaching words (e.g., showing a ladder to teach the word ladder). Almost a century later, the potential of student voice as a guiding source for instruction resurfaced with John Dewey (1938). He believed that students should participate in their own learning by solving problems that are of personal concern. Dewey's teachings on student generated learning gave momentum to the activity method for the teaching of reading. For some, this involved instruction shaped entirely around the interests, activities, and purposes defined by children (Smith, 2002).

Russell (1951) enhanced the idea of using student voice to inspire reading growth through open communication in response to reading, thus generating ideas in the minds of others. In addition, Edwards (1958) elicited student voice through the self-reporting of struggling elementary readers to define *good* reading. Lee and Allen (1963) further popularized the view and voice of the learner as a means for developing reading and writing through student generated texts. Kohl (1969) used student voice to reveal a reader's potential. Moreover, Paley (1981) found that the advanced behaviors of kindergarteners were developed through ample opportunities to celebrate their own voices during language acquisition. And, driven to assist her seventh graders in becoming incredible readers, Atwell (1991) used student self-reporting to define the classroom conditions necessary for students to be overcome by reading enjoyment and reach the "reading zone" (Atwell, 2007, p. 22).

Controversy surrounds the use of self-reporting as one component in educational studies. Some researchers (Reid, 1966; Vernon, 1967; Weintraub & Denny, 1965) have argued that self-reporting may be easily dismissed as a source of data collection because

children do not have the mental capacity to report on their reading. The scarce responses that are offered are too vague to provide meaningful insight. Others (Cairney, 1988; Moller, 1999; Triplett, 2007), including myself, would argue a contrary view point. Scott (2008) believed that collecting credible reports from children requires the understanding that child research is context dependent. Therefore, studying school reading behaviors in the safe environment of school is paramount (David, Tonkin, Powell, & Anderson, 2005). Furthermore, in person interviews enable the researcher to use routing, visual aids, and prompting to inspire insightful self-reporting from children. As well, Cairney, suspecting that the hindrances to accurate self-reporting were methodological, focused on different forms of questions to attain telling responses from children. Horrace Mann considered self-reporting to be “the origin of a better mode of instruction, suggested by the wants and pleasures of an active mind” (Smith, 2002, p. 76).

Rationale

Reading experts believe that children need to be aware of what they know about the reading process. By understanding how reading works, children can make the reading process useful for themselves (Ford & Opitz, 2008). Metacognition is the term used to describe a reader’s ability to understand the reading process and the use of that knowledge while reading (McNeil, 1992). Researchers have determined that children who are aware of the how and why of reading and their own reading behaviors make substantial strides in reading acquisition (Paris, 1983; Paris, Cross, & Lipson, 1984; Raphael, 1982; Wong & Jones, 1982). Clearly, children have shown the capacity to consider and articulate their thought processes about reading. Thus, their thoughts appear to have the potential to inform future research and instruction.

Although researchers employ many research methodologies for eliciting the perceptions of struggling readers', qualitative inquiry through Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) remains neglected. There are five reasons why portraiture seems to be an appropriate lens for narrowing in on the nature (i.e., central story) of reading struggles. (See Figure 1) First, the central story of the participant (i.e., actor) is listened *for* rather than *to* in an attempt to portray the nature of their experiences. Second, an understanding of the environment (i.e., context) in which the participant exists is critical. Third, the perceived beauty (i.e., goodness) of the actor's experiences plays the leading role in portraiture methodology. By focusing on the goodness inherent to participant circumstances, a credible account may be promoted through the voice of the actor. Fourth, the views, experiences, and perspectives of the researcher are essential for the interpretation of the central story of each participant. Finally, portraiture methodologists are propelled by a desire to build a relationship between researchers and their audience. Such a relationship intends to inform and inspire the audience. The struggling reader experience is individual, unique, and personal and an authentic narrative of the struggles experienced by the reader may be shaped through a rich dialogue between the learner and the portraitist. In the words of Lawrence-Lightfoot, "Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. xv).

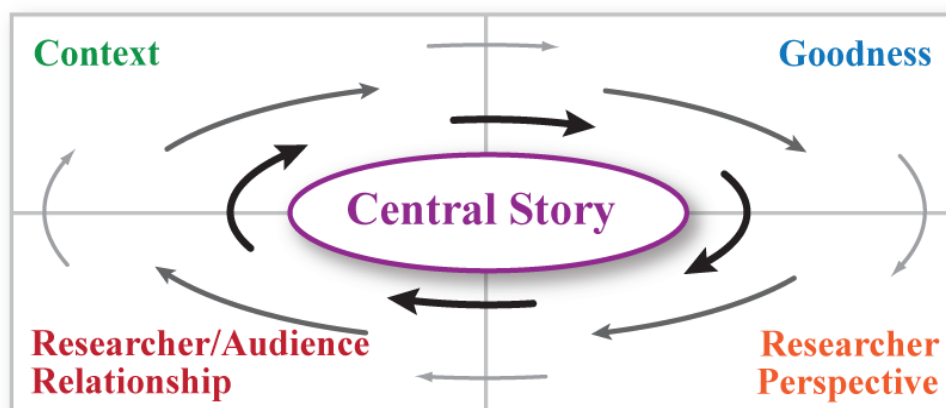


Figure 1.1. Defining Characteristics of Portraiture

Portraiture has been used to explore the nature of nurturing relationships in the classroom (Carew & Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1979), to showcase the cultural components of succeeding high schools (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), and to identify the characteristics of an individual who fosters respect from others (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000). Given the unique contributions it has offered to these investigations, it seems likely that Portraiture can do the same for research related to struggling readers. Through the qualitative methodology of portraiture, we may finally give struggling readers a voice in the direction of their reading acquisition, furthering their growth as readers.

Need for the Study

Most recently, quantitative studies appear to dominate reading research. The analyses performed by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) are but one example. Such studies showcase efforts to apply the rigor of experimental or quasi-experimental designs which include randomized sampling procedures, randomized treatments, and mathematical data analyses as the primary methods for collecting *scientific-based evidence* of reading achievement. Apparently, such studies have been deemed the gold

standard for inquiries in education.

Regardless, several reading researchers have continued to voice their support of qualitative research for the benefit of struggling readers in particular (Almasi et al., 2006; Garan, 2005). In fact, Moller's (1999) research findings led her to conclude that "More in-depth qualitative research needs to be done on children's perceptions of reading at all levels of schooling" (p. 255). Specifically, portraiture research methodology may allow us to learn more about struggling readers. It offers the framework, methods, ecological validity (Brewer, 2000), and final product appropriate for understanding the real-life situation of the struggling reader. The fact is that every reader is different. The background and beliefs of each child make reading a personal experience (Rosenblatt, 1978). It is time to research a personal issue with a personal method of inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have long advocated for using student voice to help inform the diagnoses of learners struggling to become readers (Clay, 1972; Dewey, 1932; Edwards, 1958; Moller, 1999). Even though some have revealed the significance and potential for using student voice to guide the initial development of reading acquisition (Gaskins, 2005; Veatch, 1996), few have researched the potential for using student voice beyond the initial assessment (e.g. Atwell, 1977, 2007; Durkin, 2005; Lee & Allen, 1963; Stauffer, 1970). Likewise, none have used portraiture to address reading issues. There is a need to understand the experiences and views of struggling readers throughout the reading acquisition process as a source for understanding the steps toward remedying a centuries-old problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for this study was two-fold. I aimed to extend the knowledge of struggling readers as potential informants of their own learning. I also sought to understand how portraiture methodology might be used to best explore the issue of student informed learning.

Research Questions

Two questions guided this study. The first focused on student self-reported reading experiences. The second question related to methodology.

Content Research Question

- Q1 What are the self-reported experiences of elementary struggling readers regarding their reading acquisition?

Underlying Questions

- Q2 How might struggling readers guide their reading acquisition process?
- Q3 What control if any may striving readers see themselves having with regard to their reading acquisition in school?
- Q4 How do “struggling readers” define themselves as readers in their school?
- Q5 What do struggling/striving readers view as beneficial to their reading improvement?

Methodological Research Question

- Q6 How might portraiture advance reading research as it relates to struggling readers?

Underlying Question

- Q7 How might striving readers’ views of goodness help to define and guide their reading acquisition?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is its attempt to elicit both the nature of struggling readers and the methods used to explore them. Much knowledge has been gained about struggling readers using qualitative research methods (Almasi et al., 2006). Portraiture methodology, which calls for the researcher to use interviews and observations and additional methods including context, researcher perspective, researcher journal, and the gathering of artifacts may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perceptions of struggling readers and how best to assist them as they strive to become more able readers.

This research promises to rejuvenate and illuminate the possibilities for meeting the needs of struggling readers. Allington (2006) affirmed that, “We have learned much about the design and delivery of more effective literacy instruction in the past thirty years and much of what we have learned is being systematically ignored in the current wave of high-stakes reform” (p. v). This study may provide the impetus for redirecting attention to the individual reading strengths and needs of the student.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Literature related to this study is presented in six sections. The first section, Developmental Reading, provides an overview of both nonstage and stage models of reading development. The second section, Struggling Readers, provides an historical account of struggling reader research. The third section, Metacognition and Reading, provides an explanation of metacognition and how it relates to reading. The fourth section, Researching Youth, showcases two primary ways to research and learn about children: observation and interviews. It also includes the considerations surrounding youth interviews. The fifth section includes ethical considerations when researching youth. The sixth section provides a chronological account of studies in which researchers have used portraiture methodology.

Developmental Reading

Developmental reading is “reading instruction for pupils who progress normally” (Chall, 1983, p. 252) and many reading experts have sought to describe it (e.g., Chall, 1983; Gates, 1947; Goodman, 1967). Their descriptions can be categorized into two major groups: non-stage models of reading development and stage models of reading development. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of each.

Nonstage Models of Reading Development

Non-stage theorists view reading development as being the same for all readers but believe that readers develop at different rates. Chief among these theorists are Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith. According to them, the reader uses knowledge about the world and language to draw meaning from text. They vie that the key difference between the beginning and the experienced reader is that the latter has a greater quantity of world and language knowledge (Goodman, 1967; Smith 1971). An experienced “reader uses syntactic and semantic information to form hypotheses about the content” (Juel, 1991, p. 763) and relies minimally on the orthographic features of a text.

Nonstage theorists also believe that reading development and oral language development occur in tandem and that both are natural processes used to communicate with others. With an increase in language skills comes a natural increase in reading skills (Goodman & Goodman, 1979). Goodman (1976) believed that a single process defines reading acquisition. As a game of hypothesizing, reading skill does not involve greater accuracy, it involves more precise “first guesses based on better sampling techniques, greater control over language structure, broadened experiences and increased conceptual development” (Goodman, 1976, p. 504). Furthermore, reading abilities differ according to the reader’s understanding and control of this process (Smith, 1971).

Since language and reading development are thought to be personal and social communication processes, Goodman and Goodman (1979) noted that there is no need for the child to understand the units that make up these communication systems. Instead, they believed that children primarily rely on syntactic and semantic cues during initial reading attempts. When a reader is exposed to a new word, he/she utilizes the meaning

and grammatical sound structure of the text to identify it (Goodman, 1965). Only occasionally do graphic and phonological cues assist the reader in determining a word. Smith (1971) summed up the non-stage view by arguing that reading is not something that is teacher centered, rather, it is something that is learner centered.

Stage Models of Reading Development

Like their counterparts, stage model theorists have an explanation for their theory. In essence, they believe that learners progress through a series of stages and that each stage embodies specific characteristics. Like nonstage theorists, these theorists also contend that there are differences between beginning and experienced readers, primarily with the quality of strategies they use to comprehend. Perfetti (1985) is one such theorist. He argued that the most important cueing system for the reader to acquire is the spelling-sound relationship, the graphophonic. Chall (1983), Ehri & Wilce (1985), Gates (1947), and Gray (1925) are other stage theorists who expressed the same ideas, noting that as children progress through the various stages, they perfect their ability to identify words as a result of a thorough understanding of the alphabetic system.

Several reading researchers have created their own unique models to explain the stage model of reading development. Of these, Gray (1925), Gates (1947), and Chall (1983) best portrayed the underlying views of the stage models.

Gray's stages. William S. Gray (1925) is credited for providing the first design explaining reading development (Chall, 1996). Through careful study of children's reading progress, Gray concluded that they traverse through a series of stages on their journey to becoming mature readers. He used five developmental reading stages to describe their progression:

1. preparation for reading – preschool, kindergarten, and early first grade
2. initial period of reading instruction – first grade
3. period of rapid progress – second and third grades
4. period of wide reading – fourth, fifth, and sixth grades
5. period of refinement – junior high through junior college.

In stage 1 the reader begins to observe the similarities and differences of the forms and sounds of word parts (i.e., letter names and sounds) but relies heavily on simple problem solving techniques for gaining meaning like noticing common occurring word parts and context to identify new words. In stage 2, the child learns sight vocabulary, applies it to simple, connected texts and is able to discuss the meaning of the material read. In stage 3, the period of rapid progress, the child is able to read a variety of content materials with greater accuracy, rate, comprehension, and interpretation. Gray believed that at the conclusion of stage 3 the child had attained four-fifths of the reading abilities of the average college student. In stage 4, the child continues to learn essential skills and requires formal instruction in word recognition to prepare him/her to read increasingly difficult words found in the average adult text. In stage 5, the reader refines reading attitudes, behaviors, and interests through reflection and interpretation of a wide variety of texts. According to Gray, critical reading and specialized research conclude these stages of development.

Gates' stages. Gates (1947) built on Gray's ideas. Gates defined stages as "steps or abrupt shifts from one level to another" (p. 21). He used Gray's ideas to further explain the abrupt shifts occurring during reading development in general, and early reading in particular. Although he saw the stages as somewhat artificial, he nonetheless felt that the

stages served as a valid explanation for showcasing the behaviors and abilities of developing readers (Gates).

Through his stages of reading development, Gates (1947) was intent on “illustrating some of the more important techniques and limitations shown by the typical pupil as he progresses through the elementary school” (p. 23). Gates’ stages are as follows:

1. prereading period
2. reading readiness program period
3. beginning reading period
4. initial independent reading period
5. advanced primary reading period
6. transition period from primary to intermediate reading
7. intermediate reading stage
8. mature reading stage.

In the *prereading stage*, the child acquires essential skills for learning to read. The child begins to recognize spoken words and recognizes that each has meaning. Children also develop story sense (i.e., an understanding that stories make sense and are constructed using specific narrative structures) and the use of pictures. Gates emphasized that exposure to and an understanding of the concepts associated with print would facilitate reading growth.

The *reading readiness program period* involves the initial diagnoses and the appraisal of a student’s prereading abilities. A child who is not ready to read begins a program to prepare him/her before the first formal lessons in reading are begun. A child

in this stage enjoys and understands stories. The child can briefly explain and answer questions about stories that have been read to him/her. The child has developed print concepts (i.e., holds book appropriately, understands direction of reading print, identifies printed words and lines in general, identifies front and back covers, uses pictures for understanding, etc.) and other skills associated with the prereading stage. A child in this stage develops the basic techniques and abilities that are essential for learning to read which results in less learning once formal reading instruction has begun. According to Gates (1947), the result is an easier and more satisfying learning experience for the reader.

The *beginning reading period* involves developing word awareness (Gates, 1947). During this stage, children employ various strategies for analyzing words. The level and variety of strategies depends on his/her previous experiences with text. According to Gates, those children who have received a proper readiness program have the ability to recognize words and their distinctive features. They in turn develop a reading vocabulary allowing them to maneuver successfully through this reading development stage.

Gates (1947) stated that “real reading—will be confined to texts composed wholly or at least largely of previously studied words” (Gates, p. 29). He noted that, after a month or two of identifying single words, many of the techniques of reading will have been acquired. Readers will understand directionality, phrasing, sentences, and the guessing of words from context. The understanding of new words will take place rapidly as a result of the identification of word parts including word beginnings and endings. A child will be able to read texts containing familiar words fluently, smoothly, and quickly.

Gates (1947) cautioned that in this stage it is inappropriate to have the child read any text that is unfamiliar. He instead saw this stage as a time for readers to practice good reading habits and to inspire such behaviors in the reader by reading familiar text.

Developing a fondness for reading was a primary goal for this stage.

The *initial independent reading period* involves word recognition and pronunciation. The reader uses context clues and word awareness to decipher simple texts. The simplicity of the text relies on the infrequent appearance of new words. Growth increases with experience as long as the demands placed on the reader are not too great. As with the previous stage, Gates (1947) warned of the dangers of having students read difficult or unfamiliar texts.

Gates (1947) believed that mastery of the reading process begins in this stage. Students grasp basic reading techniques including sounding out words, breaking words into identifiable parts, and using initial and ending sounds to decode words.

The *advanced primary reading period* begins after five or six months of reading instruction. Gates (1947) saw this stage running from the end of first grade through the beginning of second. Readers in this stage have accumulated an extensive reading vocabulary that is recognized quickly and accurately. They are said to “have achieved much greater ability to use context clues and to work out the recognition and pronunciation of words from the visual and sound, or phonetic, elements” (Gates, p. 31). The reader is able to understand text to a greater degree and to recognize a greater number of unfamiliar words. The reader at this stage can therefore read an unfamiliar text with fluency and comprehension. It is during this stage that fluent reading begins to take

shape. The reader rhythmically confronts text adhering to fluctuations in speed and intonation.

A shift from beginning reading to more advanced skills and processes occurs at the *transition period from primary to intermediate reading* stage. This stage progresses from the second month of second grade to the later part of the third grade. The skills acquired by the reader in first grade will no longer suffice. Skills that once allowed this reader to decipher monosyllabic words are now discarded for those that can be used to pronounce polysyllabic words. Blending is one such skill. It entails combining letter sounds and syllables to decode words. This syllable awareness marks a critical change for many children. Word and phrase awareness becomes apparent. Reading occurs in thought units and the reader is able to skim text for comprehension.

The *intermediate reading stage* is distinguished by increased speed, advanced techniques, and broader reading flexibility. This period of growth is defined by a wide variety of reading techniques. The reader is strategic and reads with purpose and intended techniques based on the text at hand. The student recognizes many words and understands and recalls more of what is read. This stage marks the time when the reader can evaluate, and reflect on what is read. This stage typically occurs at the end of third grade. According to Gates, children at this stage often need assistance transitioning to new and more advanced habits of reading. It is difficult for the reader to surrender the primary skills which have served him/her so well in the past (Gates, 1947).

Gates' (1947) last stage, the *mature reading stage*, involves the continuous advancement of the reader beyond the sixth grade. The reader grows in efficiency, word identification, pronunciation, definition, speed fluctuation, organization of phrasing, and

comprehension. The reader can skim a text for meaning and has developed the capability to read demanding texts such as textbooks and technical materials. The reader at this stage can attend to higher levels of thinking while reading and the refinement of his/her existing skills.

Chall's stages. Influenced by the works of both Gates and Gray, Chall also believed children develop reading skills through stages and they benefit from specific instruction at each stage. In fact, Chall (1996) developed the most comprehensive and widely accepted stage model which continues to be utilized today (See Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Chall's Reading Stages

| Stages | Defining Characteristics | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Stage 0 Prereading Stage <i>Preschool- Kindergarten</i> Birth to 6 Years | Visual Skills Attained | Basic Concepts of Print Attained | Auditory Skills Attained | Engages in Pretend Reading |
| Stage 1 Initial Reading or Decoding Stage <i>Grade 1-2</i> | Letters Associated with Sounds | Spelling System Understood | Develop Alphabetic Principal | Understand Connected Text |
| Stage 2 Confirmation, Fluency, Ungluing from Print <i>Grade 2-3</i> | Develop Decoding Knowledge and Ability | Text Generalizations Learned | Use Context to Gain Fluency and Speed | Confirmation of what is Known by the Reader |
| Stage 3 Reading for Learning the New <i>Grade 4-8</i> | Relating print to Ideas | Strive to Master Ideas and Read for Facts | Learning from Reading but Still Learning to Read | Read Beyond Egocentric Purposes and Move Toward Analytic Reading |
| Stage 4 Multiple Viewpoints: High School <i>14 to 18 Years</i> | Reader Deals with Layers of Facts and Concepts | Texts Offer Variations in Theories and Views | Reading Higher Level Texts (i.e., Newspapers and Magazine Articles) | |
| Stage 5 Construction and Reconstruction- A World View: College | Reader Knows What to Read and What Not to Read in Text | Reading is Constructive | Process Depends on Synthesis, Analysis, and Judgment | Reader has High Level of Abstraction and Generality |

In the prereading stage, stage 0, comparable to Gates' prereading period, Chall (1996) believed that children gain control over language use (i.e., syntax) and their awareness of the aspects of language sounds (i.e., phonological awareness). She further described this stage as one of guessing and predicting in which the child relied primarily on language and cognition to make sense of text.

The learners at stage 1, first grade through the beginning of second, benefit greatly from phonics instruction. Yet, Chall declared the underlying importance of comprehension in stage 1 stage by stating, "The process of comprehension is practiced in all of the stages, from the earliest to the most advanced" (Chall, 1996, p. 305).

Stage 2 involves an increase in text generalizations and reading fluency, accuracy and speed of reading. The child consolidates skills and knowledge learned in stage 1. By internalizing the basic decoding skills learned in stage 1, the child attends to the meaning of familiar texts. Through increased reading experiences with familiar texts he/she advances from stage 2 to stage 3 (Chall, 1983).

Stages 3 through 5 involve the onset of metacognitive processes (Chall, 1996). Readers at these stages have been found to advance in reading comprehension skill as a result of being instructed by teachers who use reading programs that are developmentally appropriate and those that demand higher levels of reading. Metacognitive instruction was found to be more appropriate and effective at these advanced stages (Thorndyke, 1977).

Struggling Readers

At the turn of the 20th century, interest in the problems associated with reading acquisition began to develop. For whatever reason, some children were having difficulty

with reading. Although it was initially believed that word blindness was the cause of reading failures (Morgan, 1896), this medical belief was short-lived. Regardless, the attention to struggling readers marked a historical milestone in the history of American reading instruction. It revealed a growing concern for reading disabilities and evoked efforts to remedy them.

A scientific movement toward helping children who appeared to have difficulties in reading gained force between 1910 and the early 1920s. Not only did psychologists take on the role for exploring the issues associated with reading difficulties, public schools contributed to the efforts. The advancement of silent reading assessments and the first standardized reading test in 1915 by Curtis resulted in a surge of concern based on the great deficiencies emerging from the results of such assessments. This concern marked the introduction of the use of the term *remedial reading* to identify those children with problems in reading and the variety of techniques used to help them (Uhl, 1916).

The onset of diagnosis played an important role in the drive for meeting the newly identified needs of readers experiencing difficulty in learning to read. Educators and researchers alike realized that reading achievement was unique to individual students. In 1922, Clarence T. Gray conceded that “no thoroughgoing individual instruction in reading can be given until careful and systematic study of the individual pupil’s reading ability has been made” (p. 8) and began the diagnosis of reading difficulties movement. According to Gray, understanding the needs of the individual child enabled the teacher to determine appropriate instruction to meet such needs. Gray’s identification of those readers requiring and benefitting from remedial reading instruction played a prominent role in remedial reading research.

Gray (1922) identified three types of remedial readers to help teachers better diagnose students and provide remedial instruction. The first were students whose deficiencies were significant yet able to be remedied. According to Gray, these readers had deficiencies in reading but none were related to mental defects. The second group included those students whose reading abilities were slight. For whatever reason, these children had difficulty in learning to read. The third group was made up of children whose difficulties were the result of poor or no instruction.

During the later part of the 1920s and the early 1930s reading research was dominated by interest in understanding remedial reading (Smith, 2002). Limited mental ability, emotional disturbance, and faulty eye movements were among the many believed causes for reading disability (McCormick & Braithwaite, 2008; Tinker, 1936). Many of these beliefs (i.e., word blindness and emotional disturbance) were abandoned at the time as most were found to be the effects of poor reading skills and not the causes (McCormick & Braithwaite).

In the 1940s, the notion that multiple causes were responsible for the reading deficiencies of learners gained favor with reading experts (Monroe, 1936). Monroe and Backus (1937) assented that no single cause could explain the problems that plagued some readers and that reading problems varied from reader to reader. Their thoughts led to the collaboration of professionals from various fields (i.e., pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, neurology, speech pathology, reading, etc.) all aimed at identifying the many possible causes of reading deficiency. Fernald (1943) added to Monroe's multicausation theory noting that the dynamics of the school (i.e., policies, materials, class sizes, and teacher training) could be yet another contributor to reading failure.

The multicausation view was echoed by Robinson in 1946 who called for the collaboration of many individuals to help diagnose reading difficulties. Her multiple causation view of reading disabilities was further advanced by Arthur Gates (1947). In his words, “The causes of reading disability are many; the remedies lie in improved, especially highly individualized, instruction” (p. 15).

The 1950s marked a time when some professionals continued to view emotional disturbances as reasonable causes for reading problems. Others began to explain reading disabilities through emotional causes which resulted in the use of medication for the treatment of reading disabilities (McCormick & Braithwaite, 2008). With the passing of the 1950s came the belief that the whole-word method used in schools was the main reason for the failures of readers (Flesch, 1955). Flesch’s ideas were the cause of great debates that would reverberate throughout the next fifty years.

Throughout the 1960s researchers continued to seek plausible explanations for reading difficulties. Some attempted to identify the precursors of reading problems. Others directed their attention to defining the physiological contributors to reading difficulties (i.e., limited brain function). Still, others believed that visual-motor defects played a role in the reading disabilities of children and efforts were made to understand eye-hand coordination. Regardless of the physiological views that emerged, Bond and Tinker (1957) were among the many specialists to provide general treatment plans for handling reading disability based on the continued belief of multicausation.

Although specific causes for reading disability such as defective memory processes continued to surface in the 1970s, multicausation dominated. Specialists and clinicians utilized a variety of methods and materials for treating their remedial readers.

They also continued to solicit the help of other professionals (i.e., psychologists, neurologists, audiologists, etc.) in order to meet individual needs of readers.

Up to the 1970s, remedial techniques were used to help children acquire reading skills as delineated by developmental stages of reading, especially Chall's first and second stages. Letter-sound relationships had been an integral part of remedial reading programs and clinical efforts included an abundance of instruction for decoding. All of this remediation was a reaction to children's persistent patterns of reading disability.

In contrast to reactive measures, Clay (1972) proposed intervention. Clay's vision valued the intervention of reading difficulties of students before they became persistent reading failures. As a proactive approach to reading struggles, Clays' intervention program, Reading Recovery, was appropriate "for those who want to ensure that every child early in schooling moves out from non-reading status and begins to engage with the task of reading books" (Clay, p. 4).

Like Spache (1981), Clay (1972) questioned the remedial reading techniques that had dominated our history of treating striving readers. Clay found that remedial reading teachers and clinicians fostered dependency in their readers. The children, although showing growth as readers, remained dependent on the teacher for the skills and strategies used to read. She developed Reading Recovery to engender reader independence.

Irene Gaskin's (1980) Benchmark School provided another example of the shift from remediation to intervention. The school staff's use of remedial instruction proved inadequate for striving adolescent readers upon returning to their regular reading instruction (Gaskins, 2000). Early intervention was incorporated into the school's

philosophy in order to address the emergent needs of readers. In an attempt to intervene with reading difficulties, the school staff began admitting younger students.

Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, treatment efforts of reading problems have continued to employ remediation and intervention techniques. With respect to the prevalent view of multicausation, both efforts continue to serve the needs of striving readers.

Current efforts to remedy the problems associated with reading development have resulted in the emergence of the response to intervention (RtI) process. This process, ensuing from the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA) passed by Congress in 2004, provides a proactive response to children appearing to struggle with reading. Fuchs, Fuchs and Vaughn (2008) argue that the importance of RtI lies in its process of interventions, resources, ongoing assessment, and focused instruction for striving readers. The process includes provisions for appropriate instruction and progress monitoring of those readers who struggle.

To summarize, educators use both intervention and remediation to assist children that appear to struggle with reading. The first includes efforts to try to catch problems early. The later involves remedial instruction based on persistent patterns of reading problems. Each perspective involves different views of the issues faced by striving readers. Regardless of technique or viewpoint, researchers continue to seek viable explanations and instructional techniques for ameliorating the reading difficulties that some children face.

Metacognition and Reading

Beginning in the late 1970s researchers began to wonder if they could better understand striving readers by taking a look at proficient readers and their reading behaviors. They designed investigations aimed at teasing out what good readers do when reading. At this time, reading researchers had begun to view reading as an active and engaging process involving the testing of hypotheses and a process for building schema based on reading as an act of meaning making (Goodman, 1976).

Whimbey (1975) suggested that good readers typically traverse a text smoothly as long as his/her understanding of what is being read is complete. Flavell (1981) and Rumelhart (1980) concurred, adding that good readers do not constantly evaluate their understanding; they attend to the meaning of the text. Furthermore, a good reader remains open-minded to the possible conclusions to be drawn through careful analysis of the text (Sullivan, 1978). However, when a reading obstacle does occur, a good reader shifts attention to his/her thought processes and utilizes the most appropriate strategy for remedying comprehension errors (i.e., self-correcting, reading ahead, rereading, questioning the text, determining the exact meaning of words or phrases, visualizing perplexing descriptions, etc.). Flavell (1978) defined this process as metacognition. He determined that metacognition (i.e., the understanding of one's own process for attaining knowledge) plays a critical role in language development and reading. He developed a four component model to depict the target behaviors that metacognitive readers use: *metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experiences, goals, and actions.*

Metacognitive knowledge involves the personal understanding of one's thinking. A reader's metacognitive knowledge may include his/her awareness of a reading strategy

that works best to comprehend what is read. *Metacognitive experience*, on the other hand, may involve the emotions or affect associated with one's thinking about his/her own thinking (e.g., realizing that what has just been read was not comprehended may evoke a reader's feelings of frustration). Metacognitive experiences are thought to diminish or maintain metacognitive behaviors. *Goals* refer to the targeted behaviors which define metacognition and *actions* include those strategies used to achieve the targeted goals.

McNeil (1992) simplified the definition of metacognition as a reader's ability to self-monitor understanding and employ metacognitive processes. McNeil further explained metacognition by defining the metacognitive processes employed by the reader:

1. self-knowledge
2. task knowledge
3. self-monitoring.

A student that views himself/herself as a reader is thought to exhibit *self-knowledge*. This includes the ability of a reader to identify his/her reading strengths and needs. *Task knowledge* involves the reader's ability to match an appropriate comprehension action to a strategy for reading which involves an understanding of the purpose of reading. *Self-monitoring* involves the reader's awareness of his/her understanding of the text. A self-monitoring reader knows what to do when realizing that he/she does not understand the text being read. In essence, a metacognitive reader (i.e., good reader) is aware of his/her own reading abilities, can resolve reading obstacles from a variety of strategies, and knows when to employ such strategies to enhance understanding. Furthermore,

metacognitive readers are those who can discuss their reading experiences, strengths, and needs.

Throughout the 1990s researchers have become increasingly aware of the potential for teaching striving readers to become metacognitive. Intervention research has shown that such students have the ability to learn how to monitor their understanding, identify obstacles of comprehension, and to use strategies for overcoming reading roadblocks (Dunlosky & Nelson, 1994; Nelson & Narens, 1990). In short, they can be taught fix-up strategies, and how to use them (Nist & Simpson, 1990).

Researching Youth

Observing Youth

Observational research is considered by many to be the foundation for all methods of conducting research (Adler & Adler, 1994; Rolfe, 2001). Studies primarily employing interview methods for data collection typically rely heavily on observational methods as well (Angrosino, 2005). Researchers of human behavior use observation to illuminate the actions of participants in relation to the physical environments in which they occur. The term *naturalistic observation* refers to the capturing of human behavior within a participant's natural environment. As an alternative to testing, naturalistic observation is a highly effective way for teachers and researchers to explore the ways in which children learn (Goodman, 1985). Although abundantly used, many research methodologists caution researchers performing naturalistic observation about their interference with the natural behaviors of the observed (Angrosino). Regardless of such interference, Adler and Adler defended naturalistic observation as a powerful source of validation due to the

resulting constancy of researcher knowledge and subsequent judgments used to describe what is viewed.

In naturalistic observational studies, the researcher's understanding of the issues associated with setting (i.e., context) allow him/her to properly utilize data collection through observation. For inquiries of youth issues, the naturalistic researcher uses observation to gather data based on the understanding that child development is:

1. social,
2. emotional,
3. experiential (Dunn, 2005).

Through complex *social* relationships with those around them, children extend their ability to understand (Dunn). To comprehend the conduct of youth and the social influences on youth an educational researcher must deliberately and rigorously study the social behaviors of youth as they interact with others (i.e., peers and teachers) in their natural settings (i.e., school and the classroom). The researcher observes youth in context to determine the *emotional* meaning resulting from their interactions with others.

Emotional *experiences* are witnessed as the participants negotiate roles and understanding. Salient experiences of the participants emerge and serve to enrich the researcher's understanding of youth.

Dockrell, Lewis, and Lindsay (2000) proposed four guidelines for conducting meaningful and cost effective observations. First, deciding which behaviors to attend to is critical. Second, identifying the dominance of certain behaviors over others is useful. Third, determining the appropriate times to observe is essential for identifying behaviors of interest. Finally, considering how other researcher's might view the very same

observations is important. Peer reviews may be used for this purpose (Creswell, 2007). Adherence to these guidelines allows the researcher to utilize observation as a practical method for the collection of information regarding youth experiences.

In light of the recent paradigm shift concerning observation in social research, Angrosino (2005) suggested that observation be viewed as something more than a practical method for collecting data. He believed that observation should be viewed as a “context for interaction among those involved in the research collaboration” (Angrosino, p. 732). As such, the role of the participant takes on greater value and gives him/her a voice in the research process. Many researchers view this as a celebration of the observed and a boost of the veracity of research findings. Observation has continuously evolved into a “matter of interpersonal interaction” (Angrosino, p. 736) which honors research participants.

A researcher who wishes to thoughtfully enhance the standing of youth participants adheres to three criteria for determining the appropriateness of his/her observational practices (McCormick, 1973). First, social researchers determine whether the value of the outcomes outweigh the means of data collection. For example, becoming an acquaintance of the observed, all the while expressing his role as the researcher, is appropriate. The depth of the researcher-participant relationship must be questioned. Second, the least harmful means must be used to minimize compromises to the participant’s personal privacy. Means for data collection must be in the best interest of the participants and subsequently seek to answer the research questions. Third, the means utilized by the researcher must never undermine the value of the research. As an example, if the purpose of the study is to nurture the dignity of the participants, the researcher must

not set participants up for ridicule by showcasing their inadequacies and perpetuating negative views toward them. These criteria are intended to aid the observational researcher in critically examining his/her means of observational data collection.

Interviewing Youth

Observations are often being used with other research methods. In particular, they naturally inform the interview process (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). The reciprocal relationship between interview and observation can be manipulated to collect trustworthy data on youth participants. Interviews provide opportunities for gathering insightful observation data as well as information used to create follow-up interviews. The interplay between interview and observation may be continuous depending on the type of interview used.

There are three basic forms of face-to-face interviews that may be used: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Merriam, 1998). *Structured* interviews follow a predetermined set of questions and serve as an oral form of survey. Structured (i.e., formal) interviews allow the researcher to elicit participant views and experiences that align specifically to predetermined questions. On the contrary, *unstructured* (i.e., informal) interviews are not guided by predetermined questions. They are exploratory by nature and allow the participant to talk openly about his/her perceptions and experiences. Responses often allow the researcher to formulate follow-up questions that may be asked within the same interview. Unstructured interviews require more time and may not elicit specific information that is pertinent to the research questions. *Semi-structured* interviews include structured interview questions (i.e., closed questions) and unstructured questions (i.e., open-ended questions) to elicit specific information *and* elaboration on the part of

the participant. With semi-structured and unstructured face-to-face interviews the focus is on the salient issues and perceptions of the participant (Roberts-Holmes, 2005).

Two techniques may be used during semi- and unstructured interviews that allow the researcher to focus on the salient issues of youth interviewees. First, a researcher may use routing to ask follow-up questions about important issues that have been elicited in previous questioning or discussions (Scott, 2008). For example, a researcher might say, “You said that you love reading silently. Tell me about that.” A researcher may also use a prompting technique to elicit more information when answers are general, ambiguous, or brief. For example, a researcher might say, “Tell me a story about being frustrated during reading.” Interviewer prompting provides an opportunity for the participant to elaborate on the statements made previously thus allowing the researcher to clarify participant perceptions. As well, routing and prompting allow the researcher to perform member checks to enhance the credibility of the participant’s story throughout subsequent interviews (Creswell, 2007; Morrow & Richards, 1996).

Issues that Surround Interviews with Youth

Researchers must consider many issues when they endeavor to collect information through interviews with youth. Among them are issues of context and power. While interviewing, a researcher is collecting data from the people and objects in context. Context is of particular importance in the interviewing process (David et al., 2005; Scott, 2008). Youth context is thought to be an “expression of the child’s personality” (Scott, p. 92). A child’s personality can change dramatically according to his/her setting. Consequently, a particular context may evoke a certain mood, behavior, or interaction. It is critical that the context of the interviews be aligned with the research questions and the

intended focus of the study. If a researcher studying youth is interested in their perceptions as they relate to school then conducting the interviews in the school setting would be important. However, the dynamics of the student/adult power relation may be unique to the school setting and prohibit the researcher from eliciting open and honest information. The participating youth may see the adult researcher as they do their teachers and choose not to respond to the researcher's questioning openly.

The power relation existing between the researcher and youth participants may stem from the underlying societal views of youth. Youth have generally held a position in society as vulnerable, incompetent, and powerless (Lansdown & Newell, 1994; Morrow & Richards, 1996). Societal views must be taken into account because they may serve to restrict opportunities to collect credible and dependable data regarding youth circumstances. If not, youth may be subjected to research experiences that further damage their positions. Knowledgeable of the ways in which society views youth, the researcher may begin to reflect on his/her own views of youth.

The ways a researcher interviews youth are dramatically impacted by his/her views of youth as potential informants (James, 1995). James believed that researchers view youth in four ways: *developing*, *tribal*, *adult*, and *social* (p. 4). *Developing* youth are viewed as incompetent and their word is discredited. This view serves to minimize the importance and potential of the voice of youth. *Tribal* youth are viewed as actors in their own world, separate from that of adults. This view isolates the youth world from adult researchers who may never transcend the developmental barrier and relate to youth on their level. *Adult* youth are viewed as competent participants of the same world as adults. This view serves to empower youth participants but brings to question the power

issues that result from entrenched social status. *Social* youth are regarded as competent and comparable to adult members (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). The key difference between the adult view and the social view resides in the attention given to levels of competencies of youth. The researcher holding the later view attends to a variety of communication methods determined by youth interest, confidence, and development (i.e., drawings, stories, poetry, etc.) which address power issues associated with age differences.

The propensity for gathering trustworthy data from their participating age group is a critical consideration for the qualitative researcher. Middleton, Ashworth and Walker (1994) believed that a child that is able to understand and react to standard questions is ready to participate successfully in the interview process. This includes children seven years or older. Scott (2008) further believed that children between the ages of seven and eleven are well suited for interviews because they are more open and willing to discuss issues that they encounter with others.

Giving attention to age, Scott (2008) questioned how the researcher might improve and evaluate the quality of interview data from youth. Advice for improving the quality of interview data includes suggestions for providing clear and comprehensible instructions throughout the entire process. Allowing participants sufficient time to answer and the opportunity to provide 'I don't know' responses are also important. Evaluation of the quality of information offered by youth can be performed through repeated authenticity checks. Since the best way to collect information regarding youth experience is done by asking youth themselves (Scott), performing repeated checks of information quality through follow-up interviews is imperative (Tein, Roosa & Michaels, 1994).

Routing and member checks may be used throughout a multiple interview process to further improve the exchange of authentic information.

Improving the quality of information gathered through interviews with youth participants is also dependent upon the behaviors of the researcher. Scott (2008) proposed two guidelines for the researcher. First, the researcher must be mindful of the appropriateness of the topic and the clarity of the questions asked of participants. Meaningful data is dependent upon the relevance of questions as they pertain to the youth's experiences and their knowledge of such experiences. Second, the researcher must develop a rapport with participants. The interviewer exudes the value of the participant's perspectives through patient and respectful listening (Kellett & Ding, 2004). By allowing sufficient response time, employing strategic listening to participant responses and acknowledging the topics salient to youth participants authentic responses may be offered (Roberts, 2000).

Ethical Considerations for Researching Youth

Munhall (1988) believed that the rigor of a study is established through intense respect for the participant. Such a belief should guide all studies involving people, especially youth. Thus, researchers must consider and abide by ethical ideas disclosed by past researchers of all participants in order to apply ethical best practices to youth. Only through a mindful review of ethical methods and the subsequent determination to adopt a rigorous code of ethical conduct can researchers improve the lives of youth *throughout* the research process.

Although researchers are constantly faced with ethical dilemmas, four particular ethical considerations may serve as a foundation for guiding those researching youth.

Together they provide a thorough code of conduct for the ethical researcher to follow. They include: *process consent*, *responsive ethics*, *relational ethics*, and *reflexive ethics*.

Munhall (1988) viewed the minimalistic ethical expectation of informed consent as “a static, past tense concept” (Munhall, p. 151). Although informed consent may be requested from the caregivers at the onset of a study, *process consent* involves the acquisition of consent and assent from the participating youth for the duration of the study (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Munhall; Scott, 2008). The dynamic nature of qualitative research calls for measures to ensure that participants agree with their ongoing involvement. Process consent requires the researcher to continuously request permission from the youth to participate and allows them the open opportunity to decline further participation at any time. This perpetual act serves to protect the participant and displays the researcher’s concern for participant perspectives and well-being.

A researcher’s concern for the youth participant can be made obvious by attending to a code of *responsive ethics*. Responsive ethics involves the rigorous attempt to understand the perspective of the participant as defined by their culture. Although researchers may never fully understand the ways of life, beliefs, and values of youth, “the responsive researcher attempts to sensitively accommodate participants” (Lahman, Geist, Graglia, Rodriguez & DeRoche, 2008, p.23) in an attempt to validate their perceptions. Furthermore, a responsive researcher discloses all intended uses of the data collected from previous exchanges (Etherington, 2007). The participant is honored as the researcher discloses all possible uses of data and is continuously engaged in dialogues to determine participant perceptions of the researcher’s documentation and portrayals.

Relational researchers regard their relationships with participants and their communities as having greater importance than the research itself (Ellis, 2007). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) viewed respect as “the single most important ingredient in creating authentic relationships and building healthy communities” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p. 1). Driven by this view, Lawrence-Lightfoot argued for the nurturing of respect in all facets of human interaction, including research. Relational ethics call for the researcher to question the benefits associated with their research and weigh those perceived benefits against the risks to youth participants (Farrell, 2005). Essentially, the researcher is obligated to gain the trust of youth participants by allowing process decent, providing open access to written work from collected data, and nurturing a caring relationship (Munhall, 1988).

The researcher adhering to a code of *reflexive ethics* keeps a researcher journal for promoting self-awareness as well as ongoing analyses (Hertz, 1997). The researcher journal serves as a medium for the researcher to hold conversations with the self about those participating in his/her studies. But such conversations do not end with the reflexive researcher. They inspire requests for participant assent, disclosure of intended uses of participant stories, celebrations of researcher/participant relationships, and portrayal of the researcher’s stance. Reflexivity serves as the premier trait of the qualitative researcher (Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2007; Lahman et al., 2008). Occurring at all stages throughout the research process, reflexivity encompasses all other ethical traits (Hertz, 1997). The reflexive researcher is able to take a critical look at his/her ethical traits and research behaviors and make practical modifications that serve in the best interest of all those involved in and impacted by the research process.

Although many of the constructs illustrated previously pertain specifically to participants in general, in view of youth as social members of our society they should certainly pertain to them as well. However, an adult researcher would be remiss if he/she were not conscious of the power imbalances between him/her and youth participants. The reflexive researcher attends to issues of inequality associated with age, race, gender, and status by disclosing representations of the researched, negotiating their stories, and honoring their perceptions. A code of ethics serves as a way for the researcher to examine the entire research process in an effort to improve the exchange of trustworthy information and enhance the quality of the study.

Portraiture Methodology

Portraiture is a qualitative methodology used to understand and creatively portray the complexities of social situations and interactions. It is a melding of science and art which guides the portraitist's quest to:

1. discover the goodness defined and portrayed by the actors,
2. interpret the actions of actors through contextual observations,
3. listen for the central story of the participants,
4. showcase researcher predispositions and perspectives,
5. nurture a relationship between the researcher and the audience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Portraiture methodology has been used over the past thirty years to understand and accentuate the goodness inherent in social situations. Following are eight portraiture studies that showcase its potential.

Jean V. Carew and Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot set out in 1979 to study the dynamics of four first-grade classrooms. Although this study was not deemed portraiture, it served as part of the foundation for it. Carew and Lawrence-Lightfoot's use of diverse methods allowed them to portray each of four teachers through individually authentic narratives. Using rich descriptions, Carew and Lawrence-Lightfoot revealed each teacher's vulnerabilities and strengths. They discovered teacher characteristics that served to ameliorate the biased views which researchers held toward teachers. They found teachers to be far more complex than traditional depictions of them as dominating central figures, manufacturers of the standard student, or judges of ability.

In her 1983 award-winning text *The Good High School*, Lawrence-Lightfoot unveiled portraiture methodology. Recounting her experience in individual and family portraits, she set out to create 'portraits' of six reputable high schools which were chosen for their reputations among their inhabitants and the surrounding communities. Using art and science Lawrence-Lightfoot sought the 'goodness' inherent to those schools in an effort to "capture the essences" (p. 14) and unveil the defining characteristics which nurtured their educational successes. She found that good schools protected themselves from outside intrusions, fueled intricate partnerships between those intent on helping the students, nurtured leadership, offered teachers autonomy, focused on the integrity of the academic curriculum, and created "visible and accountable" (p. 26) students as purported through each school's individual portrait.

In 2000, Lawrence-Lightfoot conducted another portraiture study hoping "to shape a new view of respect" (p. 9). Through the creation of six portraits, she showcased the way that respect manifests and defines empathetic interactions with others. Six lives

were showcased to illuminate the critical dimensions of respect. Empowerment, healing, dialogue, curiosity, self-respect, and attention served as the mediums for her vivid portrayal of the world-enriching concept, respect.

The Essential Conversation by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) was a portraiture study of the dynamics of the parent-teacher conference. The essential conversations between parents and teachers were studied to reveal the complexities of dialogue and the emotional underpinnings which serve as the foundations for successful collaboration. She found, not a theorem for constructing successful parent-teacher interactions, but the principles and practices that may serve to meet the critical needs of children as all involved strive to help them succeed.

In 2005, a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* included four portraiture studies to showcase essential components of portraiture methodology as they relate to the classroom, curriculum, and poetry in qualitative research (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). Using the foundational structure of portraiture, each researcher extended the methodology to develop appropriate research designs for meeting their own particular research interests. Chapman (2005) used portraiture methodology and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore the goodness in a multiracial ninth-grade literature class guided by a White female teacher. She discovered the relevance of student and researcher 'voice'. Hill (2005) studied the 'context' and 'voice' of Black female teachers in higher education. She concluded that poetry might be used, as it will be in this dissertation, to enhance the connection between qualitative research and its audiences. Harding (2005) explored the 'goodness' defining the successes of a White female teacher in a predominately Black middle school classroom. The vivid portrait of the teacher

showcased her reflective nature and rapport building techniques which resulted in celebrations of student 'voice'. Newton (2005) investigated the realities of two Arab American pre-service teachers following the 9/11 tragedy. Her findings included an expression of the value of alternative methods of inquiry, poetry and graffiti, used to create her own 'authentic portrait' and those of the two female participants.

Concluding Summary

In the preceding chapter I presented and described two opposing views of reading development, the non-stage and stage models. I gave an historical account of struggling reader research and provided an explanation of the relationship between metacognition and reading. I explained the use of observations to research youth. I further explained the potential and considerations associated with youth interviews. I concluded with a summary of studies in which researchers used portraiture methodology.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As an elementary classroom teacher for nine years, I constantly strived to meet the needs of struggling (i.e., striving) readers. Through literature reviews and personal teaching experiences, I became enlightened by the possibilities for meeting students' needs but inevitably suffered from frustration by the results of my efforts. Occasionally witnessing incredible acts of reading development, I feverishly attempted to nurture the growth of those striving to learn to read, with little success.

In an effort to remedy my frustration, I cast a critical gaze at our classroom environment (i.e., context). What I found was fascinating, yet disturbing! Peering into the social environment and strategically listening to student voices regarding their learning, I began to understand the issue. Rarely articulated student views appeared to be firmly connected to the learning environment in which they were a part. Students exhibited and expressed apprehension to voice their thoughts because ideas were often refuted or merely ignored by others. I had never fully realized the importance of a nurturing learning environment until I critically examined our classroom environment.

I began to address our problem by nurturing the learning environment and my students' understanding of themselves and one another began to change. I witnessed the new construction of participatory roles within the social subgroups of our classroom.

Crotty (1998) insightfully, yet simply, described this as human beings making sense of the same reality in different ways. The construction of meaning was dependent upon the environment and the roles in which the participants viewed themselves. Nonetheless, I had become enlightened to the possibility, initiation, and nurturing of reading acquisition guided by student voice. It was only the beginning of a year long journey toward better understanding the importance and power of student voice.

My experiences as a father, a college reading instructor, a reading specialist, a student, a researcher, and the brother of a “struggling” reader have led me to wonder why some students find reading difficult. Even though the causes and correlates of reading difficulties have been investigated since 1910 (Gray, 1917), researchers and educators have yet to explain reading difficulty with any certainty. I am astounded by the fact that some children continue to struggle to become readers. Consequently, I set out to determine how the methodology of portraiture, nested within a social research design (See Figure 3.1), might be used to understand the experiences and perceptions of learners who strive to become readers and illuminate how striving readers view and guide their reading acquisition. Attending to these issues was the focus of this study.

In this chapter, I use five sections to outline the process I used to gain a greater understanding of the striving reader phenomena (See Table 3.1). In the first section, I explain the epistemology I used to guide the study. I illustrate the theoretical perspectives in the second section and methodology in the third section. In the fourth section, I list and explain the research methods. In the fifth and final section, I address several additional methodological considerations pertaining to this portraiture study including: researcher voice, gaining access and building rapport, ethics, and trustworthiness.

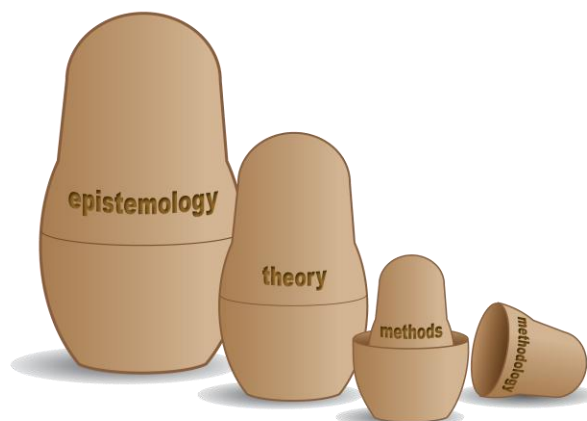


Figure 3.1. Nested Elements of Research Design

Table 3.1. Framework for this Portraiture Study

| <i>Epistemology</i> | <i>Theoretical Perspectives</i> | <i>Methodology</i> | <i>Methods</i> |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Constructivism | Developmental | Portraiture | Terrain |
| | Social Cognitive | | Actors |
| | Critical Literacy | | Observation |
| | Portraiture | | Interview |
| | | | Artifact Gathering |
| | | | Researcher Journal |

Epistemology: Constructivism

An epistemology is a view of the existence of knowledge, its nature, its legitimacy, and the reasoning behind it (Crotty, 1998). The view of human knowledge as an objective truth is dismissed by those holding the epistemological view of constructivism. That is, as people seek to understand human knowledge, their understanding is a product of individual interactions within the world around them; the mind of an individual constructs meaning through experiences with others and objects in varying contexts. This view of knowledge construction is championed by constructivists who contend that each individual constructs his/her own understanding from engagement

within the same situation, with the very same object. Schwandt (2007) explains constructivism by stating that:

We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in light of new experience. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. (p. 38).

For the individual, learning to read is a personal experience shaped through his/her interactions with others (i.e., peers and teachers) and objects (i.e., texts, experiences, and perceptions) in their learning environments (i.e., classroom and school). Therefore, the constructivist views the learner as an active knowledge builder (Dewey, 1932) and holds three major views of how readers build knowledge: a.) learning to read often occurs without any observable indicators, b.) learning to read often occurs through trial-and-error or hypothesis-testing by the reader, and c.) learning to read often occurs through the process of gap-filling or “reading between the lines” (i.e., inferencing) (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 48). These views of meaning construction by the reader provided the overarching epistemology behind this study of the striving reader experience.

In this study, I elicited the constructed meaning of striving readers. Semi- and unstructured interviews with striving readers illuminated the unobservable processes that they employ to make sense of their reading struggles and perceptions toward such experiences. Holding this view of constructivism as a way of examining the nature of reading acquisition, I employed four theoretical perspectives to make sense of three elementary readers’ stories.

Theoretical Perspectives

Crotty (1998) waded that all social research is guided by a theoretical perspective. It is “a way of looking at the world and making sense of it” (p. 8). Providing explanations for the distinguishing features of social phenomena, a theoretical perspective serves the researcher for “identifying, framing, and solving problems, and understanding and explaining social reality” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 292). Researchers bring forth their assumptions in social research, originating from theoretical perspective(s), to guide research and make sense of the meaning underlying an individual’s reality. Carew and Lawrence-Lightfoot (1979) expressed the importance of theory by stating, “the more conscious we are of the origins of our conceptual formulations, the more deliberate and critical will be our view of the research process” (p. 39).

Four theoretical perspectives were used as lenses for exploring the realities of striving readers in this study. Three of the four are theoretical perspectives pertaining to the learning process and include: developmental, social learning, and critical literacy theories. The fourth, portraiture, offered a theoretical frame for describing my view of the world as the researcher. I used portraiture both as theory and a methodology to seek the goodness inherent to the experiences of striving readers. The combination of these theories provided theory triangulation (Janesick, 2000; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Developmental Theory

Developmental theorists contest that people are individuals and their actions result from confrontations with their environments. Acts of the individual are continually modified in order to develop and strive to reconstruct their environment and become empowered, hence educated (Dewey, 1916). Piaget (1932) reinforced the idea that the

individual is the dominating agent for educational development. *The child*, as the key to growth, is dependent upon the teacher for creating experiences where new learning can be discovered, in turn propelling them to subsequent stages of understanding. *The child* collaborates with the teacher to develop an understanding of his/her own learning and the world around him/her. Dewey (1990) captured the essence of developmental theory by describing the role of *the child* in the learning environment.

The case is of the Child. It is his present powers which are to assert themselves; his present capacities which are to be exercised; his present attitudes which are to be realized. (p. 209)

For this study, guided by the underpinnings of developmental theory, I explored the contextual confrontations facing striving readers and their methods for navigating their learning through such experiences. I refurbished this theoretical lens to identify the individuality and freedom experienced and expressed by the participants. By examining the conflicts of striving readers within the reading environment, through observations of reading activities and the ensuing interviews, I set out to depict their responsive actions and statements as these striving readers navigated the reading acquisition process.

Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theorist, Bandura (1986), derived this perspective to account for the vicarious learning that occurs when learners observe the behaviors of others. He argued that learners acquire greater understanding through the viewing of others than they actually do from the consequences of their own experiences. Consequently, through observation, learners may identify such things as technique, exertion, failure, and success without having to experience everything themselves in an effort to learn. The premise for observational learning, according to Bandura, involved four distinct phases:

1. The *attentional phase* involves watching the modeled behavior.
2. During the *retention phase* the observer processes or considers what has been observed.
3. In the *reproduction phase*, the observer replicates the behavior.
4. The process generally concludes with observer satisfaction which supports the applied behavior in the *reinforcement phase*.

The teachings of Bandura have had a profound effect on the classroom practices for teaching reading. Through the interpretation of the behaviors of others (i.e., models) and the purposeful reproduction of those actions, readers are believed to become more confident in their abilities to achieve specific objectives. Readers with high self-efficacy (i.e., risk-takers, avid readers), appear to attempt and accomplish more. They also show greater tenacity for learning to read. This theory has shown to have an enduring impact on reading improvement (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

The implications for using this theoretical perspective within the scope of the study of striving readers are threefold. First, I used it to identify the reading activities that took place in the learning context of each striving reader. Through reading activity observations, I discovered the magnitude of good reading behavior models that were provided for the participants of this study. For instance, the participation of the striving reader in activities such as D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read), in which all of the students in the setting engaged in silent reading, were observed to determine subsequent interview questions for eliciting students' perceptions of the modeled reading behaviors of *good* readers. Second, exhibited behaviors of others, including the teacher, provided fodder for inquiries about other behaviors that the striving reader observes. Third, with

respect to the consequential rewards and punishments of behaviors exhibited by the striving reader herself/himself, I explored the rationale for their behaviors and consequential sense of self-efficacy.

Critical Literacy Theory

Critical literacy theorists examine the identity of deviance within a social setting. Those holding this view believe that conformity defines the basic structure of the group, thus serving to clarify social expectations and the responsibilities of its members. Those who defy conformity are labeled as deviants. Deviants, once labeled, are used to define unacceptable behavior. Furthermore, conforming members place judgments on the deviants to define their own roles in the group. Such judgments often project misguided and unwanted definitions onto the deviants (Goffman, 1963). As a result, labeling destroys the identity and autonomy of the deviant (Lemert, 1951). Critical literacy theory served as a lens for studying the identification of “struggling” readers and their perceptions of being labeled as such.

Freire (1970) sought to understand the oppressive nature of society as a means for liberating the poorly educated. He saw the repression of some people as a means for perpetuating the separation of classes. In the classroom, this may play out in the teaching of reading as a process for empowering or inhibiting striving readers. The indication of oppressive reading instruction, as viewed during interactions between the striving readers and their peers and their teachers during classroom observations, shed light on possible boundaries that hindered the reading successes of the participants. The resulting perceptions of their identities and the limitations imposed upon them in context were explored through follow-up interviews. These inquiries helped to clarify levels of control

that the striving readers saw themselves as having throughout their reading acquisition processes. Illuminating levels of control, atrocities, or “deviant voices” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) brought goodness to the foreground.

Portraiture as a Theoretical Perspective

As a methodology, portraiture (See chapter 2) is used to emphasize goodness existing within the experiences and reality of the individual (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). “The researcher who asks first, “What is good here?” is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover failure” (p. 9). The portraiture therefore, resists the social research tradition of identifying failure existing in social contexts. She/He argues that social investigations traditionally driven by the identification of things that do not work foster a view that accentuates failure. Failure views result in the dismissal of the *potential* of social phenomena, often leading to pessimism and abandonment of efforts to exacerbate the goodness in social conditions. This preoccupation with the unconstructive often results in the victimization of the least powerful participants. In other words, the victim is blamed for his/her failures (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Lawrence-Lightfoot explains,

I was concerned...about the general tendency of social scientists to focus their investigations on pathology and disease rather than on health and resistance. This general propensity is magnified in the research on education and schooling, where investigators have been much more vigilant in documenting failure than they have been in describing examples of success” (p. 8).

Instead, the portraiture denies the urge to focus on what is wrong in the context of a social phenomenon and seeks to “capture the origins and expression of goodness” and is “concerned with documenting how subjects or actors in the setting define goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9).

By viewing the world through a lens of goodness, in an effort to examine and embellish beauty, I believe that portraiture warrants acclaim as a theoretical perspective. A theoretical perspective, philosophy, or belief that guides action (Crotty, 1998), encompasses more than methodology. Methodology can be thought of as the action or strategy (Crotty) that will guide a study while theory brings belief, stance, and perspective to the action. Therefore, I posit that depending on the researcher's perspective, portraiture may be both theoretical and methodological. For the purpose of this dissertation, I embraced a theoretical and methodological perspective as a guide to identify dissonant voices, the search for goodness within the struggling reader's reality, and the ultimate creation of the students' portraits.

Methodology

A methodology provides a framework for the planning of a study and the conduct of the researcher. The framework for qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to purposefully prepare the research process, identify the questions sought, and determine methods for data collection and analysis (Schwandt, 2007). A definition and discussion of the proposed application of Portraiture as a methodology follows.

Portraiture as a Methodology

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) defined portraiture as a methodology that blends the study of beauty and art, and the emotions that they evoke (i.e., aesthetic) with the principles of social science research. "Through portraiture, researchers can demonstrate a commitment to the research participants and contextualize the depictions of individuals and events." (Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005, p. 17) Portraiture, derived from methodologies of life history, phenomenology, and ethnography to name a few,

represents the essence of what is sought in social science research. The intent is to “represent the research participant through the subjective, empathetic, and critical lens of the researcher” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p.10). The portraitist’s partiality (i.e., bias) exists as an opportunity to portray herself/himself as an active participant in the derivation of the essence of the experiences and lives of the participants (i.e., actors). The portraitist intends to produce an explicit description and listen *for* (Welty, 1983) the central story to provide a credible and dependable narrative in context. The revealing of the central story and the subsequent construction of the final narrative is accomplished through a systematic effort to observe, listen to, and interact with the participants over a period of time. This immersion results in the identification and interpretation of emergent themes of goodness. Consequently, themes combine with special attention to their context to form the final portrait (i.e., aesthetic whole).

As is the case in all studies, the role of the researcher irrefutably plays a hand in shaping the investigation and findings as is evident in the determination of the research questions, selection of participants, chosen and performed analyses, and disclosure of the findings. In portraiture, however, the researcher also plays a critical role in the navigation and narration of the central story. Contrary to some research paradigms, in portraiture the personal values of the researcher are portrayed in an attempt to manage their distortion of the authenticity of the central story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thus, the rich texts (i.e., portraits) that emerge from the inquiry are forged by the participants *and* the researcher.

Methods

Terrain

Understanding the phenomena of striving readers requires thoughtful consideration of their environment, the context (i.e., terrain) of their needs in reading.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) established that:

human experience has meaning in a particular social, cultural, and historical context—a context where relationships are real, where the actors are familiar with the setting, where activity has a purpose, where nothing is contrived (except the somewhat intrusive presence of the researcher). The context not only offers clues for the researcher’s interpretation of the actor’s behavior (the outsider’s view), it also helps understand the *actor’s* perspective—how they perceive and experience social reality (the insider’s view) (p. 43).

This view of context serves as a framework for the portraitist’s inspection and explanation of experience. Rather than attempting to control the setting as a distorting variable in the exploration of the phenomenon, as is the case with the positivist research paradigm (Mishler, 1979), the portraitist embraces the details of the environment as a means for data collection and analysis. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) defined the terrain as having five forms including:

1. physical setting / *internal context*
2. researcher’s perspective or perch / *personal context*
3. journey, culture, and ideology / *historical context*
4. metaphors and symbols / *aesthetic features*
5. actor’s role / *shaping context* (p. 44).

Taken together, these five forms play a central role in guiding the portraitist. In this study, the terrain served as a critical means for corroborating and building the striving reader’s story.

By focusing on the *internal context*, the struggles that plague a reader can be determined. Using the *personal context* in portraiture, the researcher establishes a ‘perch’ for himself. This is made possible by disclosing the role and the perspectives of the portraitist throughout the entire study. Clarity of the portraitist’s role allows the actors to respond to his presence and encourages the readers to join in on the experiences described. An interest in the *historical context* allows the portraitist to elicit the origins of the organization and deconstruct the priorities and values that provide its structure. *Aesthetic features*, including metaphors articulated by the actors and the symbols that they use, facilitate the portraitist’s identification of emergent themes and underlying meaning for the phenomena. The portraitist *shapes the context* and forms the final portrait with respect to the roles of the actors in context. Thus, the portraitist employs the dynamic framework of the terrain and its five forms to provide a comprehensive search for goodness.

Actors

To best investigate the research questions, I identified three striving elementary readers that met the full criteria of this study. I purposefully chose elementary classrooms due to ongoing student-teacher contact throughout the school day. Although the focus of this study was on student reading experiences and perceptions, initial stages of participant selection required teacher screening. The criteria listed in Table 3.2 were used to identify a purposeful sample of potential teacher participants (Creswell, 2007).

Table 3.2. Selection Criteria for Participating Teachers: Phase 1

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Selection Criteria</i> |
|------------|--|
| 1. | Participating teachers were teaching in 4 th grade elementary classrooms. |
| 2. | Teachers were conducting reading instruction activities with readers who were striving to read at grade level. |
| 3. | Participating teachers had at least three years of experience in the teaching of reading. |
| 4. | Participating teachers were teaching at each one of the three elementary schools identified for the purpose of this study. |
| 5. | Participating teachers expressed a willingness to participate in the study. |

I contacted those teachers fulfilling the Phase 1 criteria in person and provided them with a brief overview of the study, a description of their participatory role, and the research timeline. Through a follow-up conversation, using further criteria (Table 3.3), I narrowed the potential participating classrooms again to identify those classrooms that appeared to provide the greatest opportunity to explore the research questions.

Table 3.3. Selection Criteria for 1st Interview and Observation of Participating Teachers' Classrooms: Phase 2

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Selection Criteria</i> |
|------------|--|
| 1. | Participating teachers had English speaking students who are striving to read. |
| 2. | Participating teachers understood their proposed involvement in the study and remained willing to participate. |

After selecting potential teacher participants, I conducted one interview (Appendix E) and one observation with each. I then determined the three classrooms that were qualified to participate. The criterion for choosing the three classrooms was based on the routine schedule of reading instruction and the inclusion of students identified as “struggling” readers (Table 3.4). It appeared that the pattern of reading

instruction and the schedules of those classrooms would allow me to conduct observations and interviews without dramatically impacting their natural learning environments.

Table 3.4. Selection Criteria for Individual Student Interviews, Observations, and Artifact Gathering: Phase 3

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Selection Criteria</i> |
|------------|--|
| 1. | Students in participating classrooms engaged in a variety of reading instruction activities (i.e., teacher modeled, guided practice, individual practice, small group, etc.) on a daily basis. |
| 2. | Participating teacher included striving readers in reading activities. |

Fourth grade students, as members of middle childhood (Kellett & Ding, 2004), were sought for their self-reporting potential. Individuals, ages 7 to 11 years have the ability to communicate effectively about their thinking (Piaget, 1932). Using the final criteria (Table 3.5), I selected those striving readers who qualified to participate in this study. A total of six striving readers, two from each of the three classrooms, were identified as an oversampling method to account for attrition. Three students actively participated in the study.

Table 3.5. Selection Criteria for Struggling Readers: Phase 4

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Selection Criteria</i> |
|------------|--|
| 1. | Participating students were English speaking. |
| 2. | Participating students had recently been identified as struggling readers by formal test scores. |
| 3. | Participating students had recently been identified as struggling readers by an informal reading assessment. |
| 4. | Participating students had recently been identified as struggling readers through teacher judgment. |
| 5. | Participating students were projected to remain at their current school throughout the duration of study. |
| 6. | Participating students expressed a willingness to participate in the study by providing informed assent. |
| 7. | Parents of prospective student participants provided informed consent. |

Data Collection

In order for the qualitative researcher to gather information to examine the nature of a participant's perceptions and their experiences in context, several investigative procedures (i.e., methods) are employed. Such methods, tools, or techniques for gathering information in this study included interviewing, observing, and artifact gathering (Schwandt, 2007). The researcher journal was also employed to discover and generate data of interest (See Table 3.6). I used the researcher journal to organize and manage the information required for constructing the rich descriptions of interactions and dialogues between me and the actors. Collectively, these four methods were employed to promote the trustworthiness of the research findings.

Table 3.6. Design

| | <i>Voice as Witness: Observations</i> | <i>Listening for Voice: Interviews</i> | <i>Physical Landscape: Artifact Collection</i> | <i>Voice as Interpretation: Researcher Journal</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Explicit Focus of Data Collection Method | Individual Reading | Striving Readers | Student Reading Projects | Anecdotal Notes |
| | Group Reading | | Student Journals | Narrative Reflections |
| | Classroom Reading | | | Poetry |

Voice as Witness: Individual, Group, and Classroom Reading Activity Observations

I conducted 10-15 classroom observations of each striving reader as a non-participant/outside observer (Creswell, 2007). The actual time span of each observation was subject to the longevity of the reading instruction and activities in which the readers participated (approximately 1-2 hours). Through these observations I explored the nature of the role of the individual and his/her interactive behaviors. I took observational notes to describe such behaviors and interactions. I shared my simplified and bulleted observational notes with the actors (i.e., member-checking) to determine their accuracy and further explanation as appropriate. Continuous review of observational notes illuminated emerging patterns of behavior and experience that guided subsequent interviews (Stake, 2006).

Listening for Voice: Interviewing Striving Readers

The research protocol included 9-12 semi-structured 30 minute interviews which elicited thoughtful and reliable responses from the struggling readers (Cairney, 1988). An

interview occurred following each observation. All interviews were digitally recorded. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their statements for accuracy (i.e., a method of member-checking) (Creswell, 2007). Corrections and reflections that resulted from the member-checks also became data for the purposes of this study. A list of questions and topic areas used during interviews is attached (Appendix B).

*Physical Landscape:
Artifact Gathering*

Hodder (1994) referred to artifacts as “mute material evidence” (p. 398) used to study a group or culture. I collected artifacts created during classroom, group, and individual reading activities for triangulation purposes (Creswell, 2007). Written and illustrated responses to reading activities and task sheets served as representative artifacts and were collected, copied, and returned to participants. The resulting comparisons that were made between observational notes and artifacts collected allowed me to establish dependability (Schwandt, 2007). Participants were also asked to create poetry to describe their reading experiences. As a result, student-created poems were also included as artifacts.

*Voice as Interpretation:
Researcher Journal*

I used a researcher journal to further ensure the dependability and confirmability of this study. In the words of Janesick (1999), “The notion of a comprehensive reflective journal to address the researcher’s Self is critical in qualitative work due to the fact that the researcher is the research instrument.” I constantly utilized a field journal to define and refine my role as the researcher. As inspiration for reflexivity (Kay, Cree, Tisdall &

Wallace, 2003), using the researcher journal allowed me to identify my position in context, provided a reference for my biases, and honored my ethical beliefs throughout the research process (Schwandt, 2007). With every observation, every interview, every artifact gathered, and every theme that emerged during immersion, I called upon the researcher journal to illuminate my understanding of the striving reader phenomenon.

I used the researcher journal to interpret and present the striving reader story with narratives and poetry. I used my voice and those of the participants to co-construct the central story. Along with rich narratives, I also used poetry as a technique for interpreting and sharing data. Hill (2005) used poetry to resonate the emergent themes in order to reach a broader audience, to make her findings more accessible, to say what may not have been stated otherwise, and to create “living portraits” of her participants (p. 104). Poetry provided another form of communication to bond the reader and me to the central story.

Data Analysis

Much like the relationship between drafting and revision within the writing process, data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously in this study. Both were strongly intertwined and could not exist without the other. Similar to the constant comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967), the portraitist uses the “Impressionistic Record – a ruminative, thoughtful piece that identifies emerging hypotheses, suggests interpretations, describes shifts in perspective, points to puzzles and dilemmas (methodological, conceptual, ethical) that need attention” (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.188) to connect data gathering and synthetic reflections to the underlying

conceptual patterns and ideas. Consequently, themes of goodness and deviant voice can begin to take shape.

The Process

Studying the goodness revealed in striving readers' experiences and perceptions included a three action process: approaching, immersing, and organizing and constructing. Action 1 encompassed *approaching* the field of study. Conscious of and embracing my researcher bias, with clear research questions and a framework to guide the inquiry, I structured the research agenda and methods to match the actors and their learning contexts as necessary. Action 2 involved the gathering, scrutinizing, and sorting of the data by *immersing* myself in the context. Throughout Action 3, I sifted through the collected data to tease out patterns and themes that prepared me for *organizing and constructing* the narratives and poems that contributed to the final portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Emergent Themes

The portraitist uses five approaches for constructing themes that exist in the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) including:

1. repetitive refrains,
2. resonant metaphors,
3. institutional and cultural rituals,
4. triangulation,
5. and revealing patterns.

Repetitive refrains, or repeated statements, are those voiced and visually represented by the actors. The refrains showcase the perspectives of the participants. *Resonant*

metaphors are the embodiment of values held by the actors. Resonant metaphors give shape to the beliefs of the actors and their social groups. Sometimes such values are obvious; at other times, they must be discovered through tenacious and strategic listening by the portraitist. *Rituals*, both *institutional and cultural*, portray themes of a culture (i.e., classroom or school) through their ceremonial events. Rituals hold a symbolic importance in the context of the group. Through *triangulation*, the portraitist uses multiple theoretical perspectives, data collection methods, and/or data analyses to determine where data converge to support the accuracy of interpretation. *Revealing patterns*, those that do not come together to form the same conclusion or identify a likely theme, may sometimes immerge from strewn fragments of data. Their identification accentuates the researcher's reflective and interpretive abilities. Used together, these five approaches allowed me to construct the aesthetic whole, the final portrait of each striving reader.

Shaping the Final Portrait

Ambitious to inform and inspire, I sought to blend science and art as a portraitist. I also desired to welcome a greater audience to the reading and contemplation of the striving reader story. By understanding the essence and the rigorous implementation of portraiture as outlined in this study, quantitative and qualitative researchers, non- and educated parents, veteran and novice teachers all stand to gain greater insight regarding the potential of portraiture. The rigor and beauty of portraiture, its appropriateness for this study, and its usefulness in creating of the stories of striving readers are best illuminated by its creator Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005).

There is never a single story; many could be told. So the portraitist is active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and the rhythm of the narrative. (p. 10).

Through a greater understanding of the issues that this portraiture inquiry addressed, the struggles of readers may finally come to an end.

Additional Methodological Considerations

Researcher Voice

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) contended that the researcher's voice is evident throughout the entire inquiry process. Examples of my voices throughout this text include: my formal voice exhibited throughout most of the dissertation proposal, my narrative voice as evident from the opening vignette, my personal voice showcased in the researcher stance, my poetic voice as read in chapters four through eight, and my researcher voice which prevails throughout this manuscript. By embracing my voice, I set about to empirically and systematically collect data and perform empirical data analyses, all the while challenging the evidence in an effort to make clear the voices of the actors in context.

Gaining Access and Building Rapport

Access to the selected district, schools, and classrooms were initially sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). Completion of the expedited IRB, required for the study of youth, included the details of the proposed study. Once approved by the IRB, the appropriate district personnel were contacted for access. The "gatekeeper" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) for the district was informed of the intent of the study, reasons for choosing the particular district, rationale for interest in specific schools, procedure for inquiry, procedures for establishing a non-disruptive presence in the classroom, plans for reporting research

findings, and intended reciprocity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Individual school, teacher, and student access was sought following district personnel approval.

Building principals were contacted through the district gatekeeper and informed of the proposed study. A request was made to access classrooms meeting the defined criteria in Tables 3.2-3.4. Participating students were identified according to the criteria detailed in Table 3.5. Informed consent was sought from the guardians of participating students' after disclosing the intended study. Upon being granted consent to include their children in this research, informed assent to participate was sought from the students (Creswell, 2007).

Building rapport with the students was essential for bringing success to this portraiture inquiry. In an effort to build rapport, I explained the reasoning behind my interest in each individual. I also explained and granted their anonymity. Furthermore, each student was informed of the explicit purposes behind the study. Upon being granted their assent to participate, the same three students were included for the duration of this study. Through process consent, I continuously assessed each student's willingness to participate (Munhall, 1988).

Ethics

“Usually, terrible things that are done with the excuse that progress requires them are not really progress at all, but just terrible things.”

Russell Baker

Atrocities have been committed in the name of research (Hornblum, 1999; Rees, 2005). Are atrocious researcher behaviors any different from minor ethical rule bending? Of course they are, according to the severity of the harm that is caused to participants. But, essentially, both represent a researcher's level of respect for others. A researcher's

ethical stance serves to protect participants and honor their being. All participants deserve to be treated with the respect, reverence, and caring which fuel a researcher's interests in the first place.

In an effort to nurture a dialogue revolving around ethics and to learn from past experiences, researchers like Ellis (2007) have shed light on ethical issues. As a result, ethical guidelines have emerged to support researchers and protect participants. Two such guidelines include procedural and situational ethics.

Procedural ethics. Typically, the decisions that researcher's make prior to approaching the field are governed by their procedural ethics (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Governing boards such as Institutional Review Boards (IRB) are in place to review the intended procedures used to collect data from human participants (i.e., youth). Employing requirements for consent, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and protecting participants from harm, IRB committees serve as one of the most basic levels of ethical guidance, preceded only by the researcher's reverence for participants as the study is conceptualized.

Situational ethics. No matter how diligently a researcher prepares for an ethical inquiry by explaining forecasted issues to the IRB, there will always be unforeseen circumstances. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) espoused another ethical dimension which, unlike the externally guided procedural ethics, deals with the unforeseen circumstances which spring up during research involving youth. Those include situational ethics. Situations range from requests for help and statements disclosing misbehavior to the sharing of alarming information (i.e., suicidal thoughts). These circumstances, which develop in the school environment, are constantly requiring ethical attention.

*Ethical Considerations for
Researching Youth*

Munhall (1988) believed that the rigor of a study is established through intense respect for the participant. Such a belief should guide all studies involving people, especially youth. Thus, researchers must consider and abide by ethical ideas disclosed by past researchers of all participants in order to apply ethical best practices to youth. Only through a celebrated review of ethical methods and the subsequent determination to adopt a rigorous code of ethical conduct may researchers improve the lives of youth *throughout* the research process.

Arguing for ethics in social research without making reference to the purpose for conducting such inquiries in the first place makes little sense. As a portraitist, I embark on well-planned and systematic studies of educational phenomenon for one reason, to ameliorate the experiences of a culture, group, or individual. In this study, I intended to illuminate the goodness in striving readers' experiences and perceptions with hopes that striving readers of the future may cease to struggle. To fulfill such an endeavor requires a strict code of ethics. The code protects all subjects of social research and, in turn, nurtures the respectful and appropriate pursuit of meaning in social situations. It is a contract, a code, a blueprint for a researcher's integrity. Researcher integrity directs the researcher as he/she grapples with great ethical dilemmas. Five ethical considerations are:

1. process consent,
2. responsive ethics,
3. relational ethics,
4. reflexive ethics,
5. and criteria for appropriate practice.

Process consent. Munhall (1988) viewed the minimalistic ethical expectation of informed consent as “a static, past tense concept” (p. 151). Although researchers may request informed consent from the caregivers at the onset of a study, process consent involves the acquisition of consent and assent from the participating youth for the duration of the study (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Munhall; Scott, 2008). The dynamic nature of qualitative research calls for measures to ensure that participants agree with their ongoing involvement. Process consent requires the researcher to continuously request permission to include youth participants thus allowing them the open opportunity to decline further participation at any time. This perpetual act serves to protect the participant and displays the researcher’s concern for participant voice and well-being.

Responsive ethics. A researcher can make his/her concern for the youth participant evident by attending to a code of responsive ethics. Responsive ethics involves the rigorous attempt to understand the perspective of the participant as defined by his/her culture. Although researchers may never fully understand the ways of life, beliefs, and values of youth, “the responsive researcher attempts to sensitively accommodate participants” (Lahman et al., 2008, p. 23) to validate his/her perceptions. Furthermore, a responsive researcher discloses all intended uses of the data collected from previous exchanges (Etherington, 2007). The participant is honored as the researcher discloses all possible uses of data and is continuously engaged in dialogues to determine participant perceptions of the researcher’s documentation and portrayals.

Relational ethics. Relational researchers regard their relationships with participants and their communities as having greater importance than the research itself (Ellis, 2007). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2001) viewed respect as “the single most important

ingredient in creating authentic relationships and building healthy communities” (p. 1). Driven by this view, Lawrence-Lightfoot argued for the nurturing of respect in all facets of human interaction, including research. Relational ethics call for the researcher to question the benefits associated with their research and weigh those perceived benefits against the risks to youth participants (Farrell, 2005). Essentially, the researcher is obligated to gain the trust of youth participants by allowing process descent, providing open access to written work from collected data, and nurturing a caring relationship (Munhall, 1988).

Reflexive ethics. The researcher adhering to a code of reflexive ethics keeps a researcher journal for promoting self-awareness as well as ongoing analyses (Hertz, 1997). The researcher journal serves as a medium for the researcher to hold conversations with the self about those participating in his/her studies. But such conversations do not end with the reflexive researcher. They inspire the researcher to request participant assent, disclose intended uses of participant stories, celebrate researcher/participant relationships, and portray the researcher’s stance. Reflexivity serves as the premier trait of the qualitative researcher (Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2007; Lahman et al., 2008). Occurring at all stages throughout the research process, it encompasses all other ethical traits (Hertz, 1997). The reflexive researcher is able to take a critical look at his/her ethical traits and research behaviors and make practical modifications that serve in the best interest of all those involved in and impacted by the research process.

Although many of the constructs illustrated previously pertain specifically to participants in general, in view of youth as social members of our society they should certainly pertain to them as well. However, an adult researcher would be remiss if he/she

were not cognizant of the power imbalances between him/her and youth participants. The reflexive researcher attends to issues of inequality associated with age, race, gender, and status by disclosing representations of the researched, negotiating their stories, and honoring their perceptions. A code of ethics serves as a way for the researcher to examine the entire research process in an effort to improve the exchange of trustworthy information and enhance the quality of the study. More importantly, a code of ethics allows the researcher to honor his/her participants.

Criteria for appropriate practice. A researcher thoughtful to enhance the standing of youth participants adheres to three criteria for determining the appropriateness of his/her observational practices (McCormick, 1973). First, social researchers determine whether the value of the outcomes outweigh the means of data collection. For example, it is appropriate for the researcher to become an acquaintance of the observed, all the while expressing his role as the researcher. The depth of the researcher-participant relationship must constantly be questioned. Second, the least harmful means must be used to minimize compromises to the participant's personal privacy. Means for data collection must be in the best interest of the participants and subsequently seek to answer the research questions. Third, the means utilized by the researcher must never undermine the value of the research. As an example, if the purpose of the study is to nurture the dignity of the participants, the researcher must not set participants up for ridicule by showcasing their inadequacies and perpetuating negative views toward them. These criteria are intended to aid the observational researcher in critically examining his/her means of observational data collection. Through proper training, as a reflexive researcher, I adhered to these criteria and an explicit ethical code.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a set of criteria for judging the quality or goodness of qualitative inquiry. It is the worth of the reported investigation as viewed by its audiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The four criteria for the development of trustworthiness include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (See Table 3.7).

Table 3.7. Trustworthiness Criteria

| Criteria | Definition |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>Credibility</i> | Provision of assurances of the match between actor's views of their own behaviors and rituals and the researcher's depiction of them. |
| <i>Transferability</i> | Deals with the issue of generalization and provides readers with adequate information through rich descriptive accounts allowing them to apply findings to other cases. |
| <i>Dependability</i> | Effort and emphasis on the process of inquiry as being "logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). |
| <i>Confirmability</i> | Requires findings and interpretations to be connected to the actual data in clearly detectable ways in order to conclude that the data and interpretations were not conjured by the imagination of the researcher. |

Trustworthiness was established through member-checking, triangulation, and a clearly defined systematic approach to data collection and analysis. Although the aforementioned criteria aid in the development of and adherence to well defined methodology, Lincoln and Guba (1989) developed a set of authenticity criteria to be used with qualitative inquiries driven by the constructivist epistemology. For this reason, I considered the authenticity criteria throughout data collection, data analysis, and construction of the final narrative as well (See Table 3.8).

Table 3.8. Authenticity Criteria (Schwandt, 2007, p. 14)

| Criteria | Definition |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Fairness</i> | Refers to the extent to which respondent's different constructions of concerns and issues and their underlying values are solicited and represented in a balanced, evenhanded way by the inquirer. |
| <i>Ontological Authenticity</i> | Concerned with the extent to which respondent's own constructions are enhanced or made more informed and sophisticated as a result of their having participated in the inquiry. |
| <i>Educative Authenticity</i> | Concerned with the extent to which participants in an inquiry develop greater understanding and appreciation of the construction of others. |
| <i>Catalytic Authenticity</i> | Refers to the extent to which action is simulated and facilitated by the inquiry process. |
| <i>Tactical Authenticity</i> | Refers to the extent to which participants in the inquiry are empowered to act. |

Analysis Procedure

Shaping Participant Portraits

Through qualitative analysis I used inductive and deductive processes highlighting common themes and response patterns emerging during interviews and observations conducted in each of the participants learning contexts. I utilized several coding procedures to illuminate the initial themes inherent to the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of the participants. I used open coding to determine patterns of responses and behaviors which serve as answers to the research questions. Upon capturing the themes resulting from open-coding, axial-coding was used to condense themes in an effort to identify the inherent goodness of each participant's story. The goodness revealed itself in categories which were used to create the frames for constructing each participant's portrait (See Appendix C).

Procedural Steps

I analyzed the interview, observation, artifact, contextual, and researcher journal data using an eight step process.

1. Participating teachers were interviewed to identify possible participants according to a body of formal and informal assessment evidence. Teachers were also interviewed periodically throughout the study to clarify the purposes behind reading activities and to communicate their views of their participating striving reader.
2. I created written reflections on each participant's story immediately upon leaving each site after data collection. During this time, my reactions were combined with participant responses to make sense of the fresh data. Sometimes these reflective exercises resulted in theme identification. Most often the result was the determination of follow-up interview questions or observational and artifact gathering objectives for subsequent visits.
3. I found it helpful to immerse myself in the striving reader's story by listening to the audio-recording several times after (usually the same day) conducting each interview. By immersing myself in the interview data, I was able to experience the interviews multiple times while I examined the observational notes taken regarding participant mannerisms, behaviors, facial expressions, and emotional nonverbal reactions. During this step, I periodically recorded emergent themes or descriptors in my researcher journal which relayed the nature of each interview and the emotions that were conveyed.

4. Four particular interview recordings were transcribed immediately following the interviews for clarification and analysis. The remaining transcripts were created after the data collection process concluded. Approximately half of the digital recordings were transcribed by me. The remaining recordings were transcribed by a colleague. I read the colleague-created transcripts while listening to the digital recordings. This action allowed me to clarify responses and to check the accuracy of all transcriptions.
5. The transcripts were then reread and coded. Open coding (Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2002) was used to break the data (i.e., paragraphs, sentences, and words) apart to inspect its discrete parts. This process involved intimate interaction with the data. I constantly “asked questions of the data” (p. 33) such as: What is the context of the participant’s view? How does the participant feel? How do the participant’s responses and stories relate to what is seen in the observations of the classroom? What are the deviant points of view? How do the participant’s stories align with the views and beliefs of their teacher(s)? This method is similar to the “constant comparative method” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) where data are compared and sorted according to shared properties. At this point, data were sifted for the portraiture characteristics as defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) as possible answers to my research questions. During this process, the transcripts were color coded using Microsoft Word for organizational purposes.
6. Transcripts were reread after initial themes had emerged. I used Microsoft Word to organize these themes and returned to the data for axial coding. I was

able to combine multiple themes into the categories of goodness used to create the portrait frames. The view of the participant, participant's view, participant's understanding of reading, and participant's achievements would serve as the frame for each portrait.

7. Using the entire set of data, including participant created poems that were requested, I created the final portraits. During this time I revisited digital recordings, studied artifacts including participant created poetry, reviewed transcribed data, sifted through the researcher journal, and consulted the research questions to guide the development of each final story.
8. Each story was offered to the participant, their parents, and their teachers for member checking. Lizzy and her parents offered feedback after reading her story. Daniel's teacher offered feedback after reading Daniel's story. Emma's teacher offered feedback after reading Emma's story. This step allowed the comparison of each portrait with the participants' verbal and written reflections offered after reading it. This member check supported the trustworthiness of the data collected and the authenticity of the final portraits.

Findings

The findings are presented in a nontraditional format. Instead of one chapter, each participant's story is showcased in a separate portrait and make up chapters five, six, and seven. Individual portraits reveal the goodness and celebration inherent to individual reading circumstances. Four views provide the frames for the portraits of these striving readers. Those four views provide the reader the opportunity to get acquainted with the participant ("View of Participant"), understand the striving reader's experience from

his/her perspective (“Participant’s View”), identify with the meaning of reading to each striving reader (“Participant’s Understanding of Reading”), and appreciate each reader’s ability (“Participant’s Achievements”).

Concluding Summary

In the preceding chapter I describe and illustrate the constructivist epistemology and the theoretical lenses I used to make meaning during the exploration of the striving reader phenomenon. These lenses include: developmental theory, social cognitive theory, critical literacy theory, and the portraitist’s beacon, goodness. I thoroughly explain the design and methodology for the exploration of the experiences and perceptions of three striving 4th grade readers. I conclude with the analysis procedure I used to create participant portraits.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCHER'S PORTRAIT

*“People will forget what you did. People will forget what you said.
But they will never forget how you made them feel.”*

Dr. Maya Angelou

Introduction

We research educational practices in order to improve them. We read educational studies intent on making sense of them. We question the researcher's methodologies and methods attempting to trust his/her findings. Yet, without a thorough understanding of the researcher's experiences, background, and beliefs (i.e., portrait), we may never fully trust the findings of qualitative studies.

The audience, who vicariously experiences a study by reading its author's report, can make meaningful personal connections and draw more accurate conclusions by studying the researcher's portrait in tandem with the researcher's findings. Therefore the researcher's stance must be revealed. The methods used for creating autoethnography serve this purpose. Autoethnography allows the researcher to depict his/her story (i.e., portrait) using numerous and varied methods (e.g., narratives, personal stories, and poems).

Using poetry, a vignette, an award ceremony address, and a personal letter I created my autoethnography. I used a portion of Durica's (2007) poem, *The Labeled Child*, to depict my view of the learner, a vignette to illustrate a conversation between me and a parent to describe my view of the foundation for student success, desire, and an

award ceremony address to illuminate the underpinnings of student success. I also used, a letter sent to me by a previous college student to portray the value of my actions as a teacher. Finally, I offer a portrait of myself in a concrete poem depicted through various definitions of autoethnography.

My View of the Learner

The Labeled Child

I pray most of all for some magic day
 When the tests, the labels, and the names
 Will disappear-will be forgotten.
 When each child who enters a classroom
 Will be an apprentice of learning.
 When each classroom will be a safe place
 To discover-on your own-
 What will be the struggles of your life,
 And the victories.
 When the feeble and the bright,
 The gregarious and the shy
 Will all find their place
 In the great adventure of education.
 When the only label that will be attached to anyone is
 LEARNER

Durica (2007, p.38)

My Voice

Mrs. Allington registers her son in January. He will begin attending our public elementary school following the conclusion of the winter break. Prior to this, Jeremy has been homeschooled and has traversed the previous three and a half school years under the protective educational umbrella of his mother and father. He will soon join our third grade classroom.

We meet the day before the spring semester. Mrs. Allington's concern is apparent. With a slightly forced smile, hopeful eyes, and her child held under wing, she stands at the threshold of Jeremy's new classroom.

This situation is entirely new to me. Not the hopeful anticipation of including a new student into our classroom, but transitioning one whose experiences have been carefully guarded and guided by his caring parents solely through homeschooling. To confound matters, beginning a new school in the middle of the year will serve to test the caring nature of our classroom community.

Introductions are made and I kneel to introduce myself to Jeremy. Relief washes over Mrs. Allington's face and body. She relaxes.

"I am tickled that you will be joining our class Jeremy!" I announce through smiling eyes and lips.

He responds with a smile of his own.

Mrs. Allington begins, "What will he be learning? How will you teach reading to Jeremy? What will you do to challenge him as a writer?"

I listen precisely as she expresses her academic concerns. "None of those issues matters to me Mrs. Allington." I respond thoughtfully.

Her face contorts revealing her heartfelt astonishment.

"I care about Jeremy's desire to be here. I look forward to this being one of his favorite places to be. If we can achieve that, then all of the academic issues will be addressed." I explain. "Would you do me a favor?" I continue. "Would you keep me informed as to how Jeremy feels about coming to school over the next few days and weeks?"

With a blissful smile Mrs. Allington replies, "Sure, and please, call me Kathy."

"Rest assured Kathy, I do know a few things about teaching content. But I do have a lot to learn. He will continue to take charge of his reading and writing and show

his command of these arts. If he loves to come here, Jeremy will be highly successful as a reader and writer when the year concludes.” I explain.

Kathy embraces me as if I were an old family friend. I then hug Jeremy and they leave swinging held hands.

Parent Voice

Master of Ceremonies: “I would like to introduce a teacher through some information included in his Teacher of the Year nomination by parents.”

“His students have shown substantial improvements in academics, attendance, and behavior.”

- Students as a whole have grown 2.1 years in each of the last two years in math and language/writing ability according to NWEA standardized RIT scores
- Students as a whole have grown 1.9 years in each of the last two years in reading ability according to NWEA standardized RIT scores
- 80 % of his students have had perfect attendance this year
- No student behavior referrals have gone to the office within the past five years

“For years he has designed and coordinated extracurricular activities for his students.”

- For the past two years, Pottery Club met twice a week for two hours before school
- For the past three years, Chess Club met one day a week for one hour before school and included an average of 30 kids from kindergarten through fifth grade
- For the past two years, the BS Press digital newspaper was produced by his third grade class and a partner teacher’s fourth grade class and made available to the student body and staff four times a year
- For the past four summers, Summer Literature Discussions met one day a week and included approximately 50 students ranging from pre-k through eighth grade (past students now in middle school)

- For the past two years, the Nutrition Fair, in partnership with a local athletic club, served to inspire third graders and their families to conduct and present research on exercise and improved eating habits

“He has inspired nurturing relationships with students and parents.”

- Milk and Cookie night brought in his third graders and their families to develop community through reading and language activities including read alouds, poetry sharing, and singing
- Student-parent-teacher conferences led by students showcased their strengths, successes, and roles in learning
- Constant communication with parents served to celebrate student achievement and create goals for continued student success
- Classroom volunteers, at the rate of two per day, shared their talents and interests by working directly with students
- Eating lunch with his students as a whole, in small groups, and individually allowed him to nurture interpersonal communication, build classroom community, and address social issues

“He has motivated student learning by creating a nurturing classroom environment which celebrates exploration and communication.”

- His classroom is a sanctuary for learning and is littered with pets and the resources necessary for understanding them (See Figures 4.1-4.3)



Figure 4.1. Classroom pet habitats arranged for student research and care.



Figure 4.2. Classroom pet habitats used for research observations.



Figure 4.3. Classroom pet habitats arranged for feeding observations.

- Determined by individual interest, his students are charged with the research and care of all classroom critters
- The use of classroom pets serves to enhance respectful classroom behavior, individual responsibility, motivation for learning, and the authentic uses of reading, writing, research, scientific investigation, math skills, and knowledge sharing
- His students further develop their skills in math, reading, writing, communication, and technology by studying basic programming using 'MicroWorlds' software to create animated books and comics

Master of Ceremonies: “‘At this time, I would like to offer Mr. Schendel the opportunity to say a few words.’”

“‘I take little credit for this award. It is however, a reflection of the amazing learners, their incredible parents, and my knowledgeable peers who support me as I strive to create a nurturing learning environment. I am tickled most by my students desire to learn and their love of school.’”

Student Voice

Dear Mr. Schendel,

I was in your EDRD 419 class this semester and I just wanted to thank you. You were one of the best teachers that I have ever had. I love your enthusiasm and how you care so much for your students. You brought the spark back to me for being a teacher and although there are times when I question if this is what I want to do with my life, I reflect on your class and the joy that you shared with us about your students and I can't wait to begin.

I have always been shy in school and never really get to know my teachers--nor do they know me. You are one of the only teachers who knew my name. I know that it is a simple thing, but it meant a lot. While in your class, I may not have said too much or seemed too enthusiastic, but I really enjoyed coming to hear what you had to say (and how you said it) each class. I learned so much not only from what you taught us, but also how you taught us.

I just wanted to let you know that I really appreciated having you as a teacher. And thank you for everything!

Sincerely,

Jenny E. Hathaway

Jenny E. Hathaway

Figure 4.4. Letter written by a previous college student

This portrait showcases my educational beliefs that converge and form the foundation for the decisions that I make as a researcher. Figure 4.4 shows my perspective and my ethical stance on teaching and research.

a u t o e t h n o g r a p h y .
a study of the self Nested in
culture. Experience. An invitation to
relive. Meant to bring to image, Bring to
mind.¹ Audience asking, Who are you? Who
am I? A point of reference. In relation to you,
To them, no, To others. Obligated to committing
Responsibly?² balancing act.”³ A tio laden
Emotional experiences garnish life’s embodi-
ment through authored self - consciousness.⁴ Cri-
ticism of socially interactive characters.⁵ Lived
experience Should tip the scales on Reading
experience.⁶ Moreira’s voice.⁷ I speak for
myself, My culture. I am Other.⁸ Written
somewhere, by somebody! My story,
Allowing me to tell, The stories of,
Others.⁹ The researcher’s stance
continues to un-fold, Once upon
his story told.¹⁰

Figure 4.5. Autoethnography: My portrait as a researcher

CHAPTER V
LIZZY'S PORTRAIT

A View of Lizzy

Outside.

Chipped pink polish,
pampering,
but not priority.

tousled brown hair,
signature.
definitive smile,
delightful.
tall, slender,
4th grader.
kaki Capri's,
tennies,
and collared white polo,
to Code.

Basic beauty,
Cute as a button.
Straight out of a Rockwell painting
In the Saturday Evening Post.

Inside.

Observant,
Tenacious,
Silly,
Yearning,
Grateful,
Lovable,
Eager,
Relentless.

A model learner.

Disheveled, sweet, and enthusiastic are a few words which may be used to describe her. Her tousled hair only adds to her adorability. It is a style which reflects her hidden relationship with reading, one of practicality. Her hair is not altogether messy. It is controlled to the point that she may function for the day. It is a convenient arrangement for a busy 4th grade girl learning to dance, play piano, play soccer, and read.

Lizzy is friendly. Her most notable feature is her smile, a gift that she offers to the world. Put simply, it is delightful. Supported by her sparkling eyes, her smile warms the world around her. It uplifts. Interestingly, it reveals no sign of a struggle.

The end-of-year reading assessments for third grade prompted concern. Fourth grade initial reading assessment results reinforced those concerns. Her identified needs include comprehension and vocabulary development for grade-level texts. Her teachers and parents express the same concerns and point out her needs in identifying the main idea and explaining the, what and why of a text she has read. In fact, when I first met Lizzy she affirmed these concerns by telling me, “I have a hard time understanding some books because of the big words.”

The communal belief in her reading needs serves as a benefit for Lizzy. At home she is supported by a mother and father who show great interest in her reading development by making reading an important daily behavior. At school her support system includes not one, but three reading teachers whose classes provide diverse contexts which serve as the foundation for her continued reading growth and success. As a result, Lizzy receives continuous reading support throughout her day.

Lizzy's View

9:20, Lizzy scurries into Mrs. Swift's class. She already has her free-choice book open as she plants herself in one of the six desk chairs. Her eyes are fixed on her book. With the ability to read a book of personal choice and to finish her snack of cheese and crackers, not once do I see her look up. The other five striving readers flow in and find their seats. All but one begins reading immediately. The one, a small boy dressed in camouflage, peers up at the reading aid, Mrs. Swift, who is seated at the half-moon table resting in the corner of the ten by twenty-five foot classroom. While the others appear absorbed in their free-choice books, he seems content to watch her sift through the previous day's reading tests. He shows no signs of being remotely interested in silent reading. In fact, he has no book in sight.

The students appear impervious to my participation. Only a few of them even take the time to shoot a glance at me from their books. Seated cross-legged at a round table in the corner of the room I smile as our eyes meet. In turn they smile back and quickly return to more important matters, silent reading. Lizzy does not look up at me. She is immersed in her thick chapter book, *Help a Vampire Is Coming*.

9:25, "It is time for our hot and cold reading," announces the teacher, breaking the reading trances of four of the five students reading. The small boy in camouflage, nearest the teacher, need not put away his book, he never got one out. He does transition however. He draws his reading anthology from his desk and scoots up to the board to record his name under the column labeled 'Cold'. He immediately turns and sits down with the teacher as she proceeds to track his one minute initial reading of a passage in this week's reading packet to determine his baseline score. The packet includes a week's

worth of reading worksheets and several timed reading passages. It is designed for reading practice of those skills learned in Mrs. Key's remedial reading classroom. Mrs. Swift adds thirty words to his word count and sends him off to his desk to practice reaching 'his' new reading goal. Upon returning to his seat he begins listening to the story on a compact disk player as he reads along. Then he reads the story a few more times to increase his reading rate before scurrying back to the board to write his name under the 'Hot' column.

Except for Lizzy, the others perform the same ritual as their camouflaged classmate. All appear to be immersed in the timed reading process at different points.

"Deet Deet Deet! Deet Deet Deet!" One minute timer alarms litter the air of this reading test cycle as if to scream, 'STOP READING!' At least that is the way that I see it. The kids see it differently. The timers and their alarms actually serve as cheers toward reaching their reading goals. Students tell me that they enjoy using them and racing against the clock. The alarms constantly erupt from all over the room. I giggle under my breath as I jot in my researcher journal. The persistent eruption of beeps reminds me of the only time I used a reading timer during my nine-year elementary teaching career. I recall starting the stopwatch as I assessed Clifford reading a passage from the Qualitative Reading Inventory II (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995) in order to determine his words-per-minute reading rate. I finally stopped the timer after forty-five minutes of silent reading, twenty minutes of read aloud, and Clifford and all of my other kids had gone home for the day. I should have known better.

Lizzy jostles out of her silent reading zone. It is now 9:31. She glances around the classroom and hesitantly marks her place in her book. With a faded smile and an audible

sigh she puts her book away and pushes herself to the board to sign up for a cold read. After her baseline assessment with the teacher, Lizzy spends the next fifteen minutes reading the passage multiple times in an attempt to increase her reading speed. She uses the timer for two one minute reads and then resorts to reading along with the recording. She tells me that she likes how slow the person on the recording reads the story. “I like to listen along. It helps me remember the story for my summary and helps me with the big words.”

With little time remaining, Lizzy jots her name on the board for a hot read. She did it! She was able to add thirty words to her reading for one minute, thirty-five words actually. Later that day, I ask Lizzy about her assessment with Mrs. Swift. She tells me, “I am happy that I met my goal.” Her smile clearly shows her elation. When I ask why she is so happy she explains her reactions for me. “I wanted to reach my goal so I wouldn’t have to read the story again. If I don’t reach my goal I have to practice that story again. I get tired of the story and want to go on to another story,” she declares. I then ask her to tell me about the story that she read. She explains little about the passage, only a few details about what it is like to be a dog. She goes on to tell me that reading fast allows her to get through the story and that, “sometimes when I read fast I don’t remember.” Nevertheless, she is excited to have reached her goal so that she can move on to another, more interesting story.

9:52, Lizzy slides into her assigned seat among the small island of desks. In a room only half the size of Mrs. Swift’s, Mrs. Key’s reading room is strategically attached to the Library. This allows Lizzy and her five classmates to take their Reading Counts quizzes on the computer after reading each book. There is an entirely different feeling in

this reading environment. This is the epicenter of the “push” that Lizzy talks about as a reader. The drive to unravel the mysteries of reading stem from here. In this room, “reading is hard” as Lizzy’s poem depicts.

Reading Is Sometimes Hard

Do you think reading is sometimes hard?
Because,
Sometimes,
You have to
Write a card about reading.

Reading,
Reading,
Can’t you see
You are so hard being reading?

Nevertheless, Lizzy approaches the gateway to this classroom with her delightful smile. She celebrates the activities within. She exclaims, “It is hard and I feel pushed and frustrated” but “I am learning how to become a better reader.”

At all of our meetings Lizzy rejoices over the opportunities provided in Mrs. Key’s room. Her celebrations are coupled with the huge demands inherent of this learning environment. She expresses her understanding of the high expectations and their need. Although troubled by the constant demand, the “push”, she consistently shares her understanding that these activities “help me to understand reading better.”

Of the many activities completed in Mrs. Key’s classroom, Lizzy and her peers focus primarily on identifying main idea and supporting details, identifying and learning about unknown vocabulary, and practicing test-preparation tactics to prepare for standardized assessments. The texts are prescribed for each student according to their individual reading level. All practice is completed in these leveled texts. In here, the kids are trained to use reading strategies. The opportunity to apply their reading strategies

occurs in Mrs. Swift's class where they practice in their weekly packets. In Mrs. Key's classroom, Lizzy learns each skill and the steps of the process for utilizing each. Occasionally, the kids get the opportunity to read their leveled books silently for five minutes. They relish this time.

Following the nine week test-prep cycle between Mrs. Swift and Mrs. Key's classrooms, Lizzy begins attending the regular classroom during reading time. Her class and another 4th grade begin congregating for literature circles. The desire that she often expresses to me about remaining with friends during reading is now being honored. Although her literature circle is made up of students outside her circle of friends, she expresses jubilation at simply being back in the same classroom with them.

Lizzy enters literature circles with high hopes. She expresses her excitement for the opportunity to talk about what she will be reading in literature circles. She shares a few statements that showcase her excitement for the prospect of getting to discuss books. "I want to hear what other people think about the book." "I want to tell them about my book and maybe they will want to read it too."

Soon after beginning literatures circles Lizzy describes the boredom that is developing with them. This response to literature circles is consistent with her reaction to other reading activities. She expects her interest in all reading activities to run out, in time. She once told me that she desires "a change once in a while to keep it interesting." The following poem, created by Lizzy, reveals her exasperation with reading which results from the redundancy of her daily reading activities.

Reading is Sometimes Boring

Do you think reading is sometimes boring?
I do. Sometimes.

I hate when stories are
About gew!

Reading,
Reading,
Can't you see!
There is a bee by that tree!

Reading,
You know you are sometimes boring.

I
Feel
Like
Daring you,
To
Go
Away
With
Someone else.

Reading just please go away!

Lizzy shares her potential interest in literature circles frequently. Although chosen for her by the teacher, with sparkling eyes and a broad smile, Lizzy reveals her authentic desire to read her literature circles book. She is tickled to share the book with me and poses questions that she would like answers to. She visualizes the strange occurrences in the text and wonders whether her classmates “see the same things as they read?” She also expresses her escalating discontent with a particular character in response to how he talks to others in the text.

Most of Lizzy's reading interest is driven by her own questions. But some of the teacher's questions inspire her to discuss fervently with her peers and enrich her comprehension of the story. She particularly likes questions about putting herself in the story and inquiries about what she would do as one of the characters. But all too often

Lizzy shares the feeling of confinement that the teacher's questions bring. She often states, "I wish we could talk about what we want to talk about. There are a lot of things that I want to know about the story." She continues to strive to grow as a reader but often finds that the demands don't necessarily match her interests. The concern for Lizzy's reading needs manifest from this mismatch. A lack of interest serves also to camouflage her comprehension skills and metacognitive behaviors. Regardless, Lizzy strives to push herself to become a better reader by reading texts that she has no connections with and doing activities which lack purpose and feel awkward.

Lizzy strives to become a better reader by reading at home. Although busy with several other extracurricular activities, she makes time to read at least twenty minutes a night. Lizzy constantly celebrates her mom as her primary reading coach. Her mom serves as a model for choosing texts and an inspiration for finishing them. Many of the books that Lizzy chooses to read are inspired by her mother.

"I feel like I am a good reader when I finish a long chapter book," exclaims Lizzy. She credits her mother for inspiring her to finish books. Her mom urges Lizzy to give a book a chance and read at least half of it. The half way point was set as an arbitrary goal by her mother to get her to finish those long chapter books. Nevertheless, Lizzy often discards her lengthy chapter books after reading halfway and realizing that she still has "so many chapters to go and the book is still boring."

Lizzy's Understanding of Reading

"Good readers read long chapter books that have big words in them," states Lizzy. This serves as one of the many meanings of reading to Lizzy. In fact, reading takes on multiple meanings throughout her daily experiences. On several occasions I had asked

Lizzy, “What color is reading?” It is an abstract question that requires some explanation. However, the first time she simply answered, “Blue,” then proceeded to explain both literally and figuratively.

“Reading is blue,” Lizzy says. “Reading is blue like the background in the book I am reading right now in Mrs. Key’s classroom.” She also uses blue to describe the emotion that she feels when reading that same book. “Blue makes me feel like I am not sure what the story is going to be about. It is confusing.” She goes on to explain that the story is strange and that she doesn’t see the main idea in the same way that the teacher explains it.

Lizzy also uses red to describe her frustration with reading. She describes today’s literature discussion reading as being red. “It is frustrating when a lot of people are getting lost in the book.” She explains what went on during their group’s round robin reading following the answering of questions on the board. “They say, WE ARE RIGHT HERE! YOU should know THAT!” She mimics in a callas tone.

In today’s literature discussion, the frustration continues. Displeased with the questions that they are to answer, projecting groans and furrowed brows, each group member takes a brief turn answering the questions posed (See figure 6.1).

| |
|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>MOOD</u></p> <p>How did you feel while reading the book?</p> <p>What was the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- funniest part?- saddest part?- most exciting part? <p>What do you remember most about the story?</p> |
|--|

Figure 6.1. Questions posted for literature circles

Regardless of the teacher’s thoughtful attempt to personalize the questions and inspire deep discussion, the group’s conversation is brief and procedural. Yet, Lizzy remains hopeful that the next literature circle will allow her to “tell others about the book that I am reading and the stuff that I think is interesting.”

Lizzy is in luck. The luster of the potential of literature circles returns the next day. Ironically, the excitement originates from the question displayed on the board. ‘What would you do if you were one of the characters in the story?’ Students are delighted. Discussion erupts.

“I would want to see the circus!” declares James. “Simon (the main character) is lucky to see it because of how it is described in the book. It sounds so awesome! What do you think Sara?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think that I would want to go to the circus because it says that there are half-naked ladies there. I don’t think that is appropriate. He is in 4th grade!” Sara answers.

“Yeah, I agree. He shouldn’t be there. I wouldn’t go there,” remarks Tom.

Their discussion continues as it revolves around several of the characters in the story and the readers’ reactions to their situations. This discussion is quite different from the previous one. It is lively, insightful, and respectful, as Lizzy’s poem, *Reading is Sometimes Yellow*, illustrates.

Reading is Sometimes Yellow

People were helping each other,
Today.

Yellow makes me feel bright.

Bright means,
Respecting, and
Being nice.

When someone is mean,
It makes me feel,
Dark.

Today reading is yellow.

The purpose of reading continues to baffle Lizzy. As read in her color descriptions of reading, Lizzy sees reading as many things. But, rarely does she define reading in the same way. When she does describe it consistently, it is defined as fast and accurate. These are the beliefs that she has acquired along the way, picked up in her daily reading activities. Lizzy strives to make sense of reading. As seen through her poems, her color descriptions of reading, and the emotion used to describe it, she definitely has a sense of the beauty and the potential of reading.

Lizzy's desire to make sense of reading shows in her behavior. She pays close attention to several sources of stimuli in her reading environment. Furthermore, Lizzy is observant and shows here awareness of the reading behaviors of peers.

Lizzy is often seen using the behaviors of her peers to make sense of reading. She sets goals based on the size and difficulty of the chapter books which she observes them reading. She is also driven to understand the "long" and difficult vocabulary so that she may "know what is going on in the book and know what they (peers) are talking about." Her desire to fit in and be included in discussions, formal and informal, drives her to understand her text. Her social role as a reader surfaced in many of our interview sessions and proved to establish the importance of social learning in her reading development. She

values the behaviors of her peers as reading models and values their beliefs as she strives to understand what reading is all about.

Lizzy believes in her teachers. She trusts them. An excellent model for on-task behavior, Lizzy appears to be listening intently at all times during reading instruction. She proves her attentiveness by answering her teachers' questions and articulating her understanding during our interviews together. She explains what I have noticed during classroom observations and shares her evaluative reflections of those experiences. As she reflects, making sense of her reading experiences, Lizzy expresses continuous confidence in her teachers. Although she does not always agree with their decisions and sometimes questions the value of issues like timed reading tests, teacher led literature discussions, and point accumulation for reading goals, she exuberantly shares her support for her teacher's efforts on her behalf. The following poem, created by Lizzy, depicts her understanding of the role her teachers play in her reading development.

If I Were the Reading Teacher

If I were the reading teacher:

I would be a little
Strict,
So they can learn and understand.

I would feel bad.
But,
They need to learn.

Lizzy offers, "They want me to be a good reader like they are. That is why they push me to get better."

Amidst all of her teachers' modeling, explanations, and expectations Lizzy showcases her willingness to learn how to read. She seeks to understand. Like the

impetus for her interest in reading chapter book mysteries, she craves to unravel the mysteries of reading. This desire reveals her juxtaposition, torn between reading for fun and reading to grow. In her mind, the two are different.

She is pushed to practice prescribed texts to the point of utter boredom and therefore understands that fast reading is a strategy used to “get through boring parts quickly.” Fast reading is a tactic used to quickly get to parts that are of greater interest to her. It is the “author’s fault that parts of books are boring. They should know that the reader will not be interested.”

Lizzy’s Achievements

How does Lizzy know when to slow down? “I slow down when the story gets interesting and talks about characters that I like and the interesting things that they are doing,” she explains. In this way, Lizzy repeatedly shows her ability to comprehend the long chapter books that she continues to attempt to read. She shares her self-monitoring ability by explaining that she knows when her interest is fading and what she does to get through such lulls in the importance of the text. She explains the conversations that she has with the author while reading, “I hope that you are going to talk more about this” and “I hope this stays interesting.” When the author fails she resorts to reading fast in order to bridge the gap in interesting material.

Lizzy constantly synthesizes, infers, and evaluates what she has read. Her metacognitive ability revolves primarily around her efforts to remain interested in what she is reading. Through synthesis she identifies those elements which keep her attention: the characters, their weird experiences, and the mysteries to be solved. She uses inference to consider the author’s reasoning for taking such turns in the direction of the book and

prediction to determine if she will be led in a direction of interest. When her interest is peaked she evaluates the characters and their reactions to situations and relates to them personally. Is Lizzy struggling?

Lizzy is struggling. She is struggling to find books that will hold her interest. Her reading ability shines above her ability to find a book, an author, an experience to which she can relate to and consider as a reader. But she struggles to showcase her reading skills, ability, and strategies at typical opportunities provided in the classroom. So her skills remain ignored during these activities. During the timed reading of a boring book or a book that has been worn out through countless readings, her skills go unnoticed. During an Accelerated Reading quiz in which the goal is the accumulation of points and not a celebration of skills, her ability is invisible. During literature circle discussions fueled by teacher determined questions rather than student inspired interest, her strategies are unseen. Her struggles in reading appear to be a reflection of the activities chosen to assess her skills. She is not a failure. The measures used to assess her often are.

What would it take to showcase her reading talents? It would involve her, an interesting mystery, uninterrupted reading time, and opportunities for her to talk and write freely about her reading. The immense support that she receives from her teachers, her family, and her peers is not offered in vain. It has provided her with a sturdy foundation for reading development. Through clarifying the purpose for reading and being afforded with many more opportunities to “just read a good book” she could get to fully enjoy the pleasures of reading and celebrate her many reading successes. She could maximize her reading potential.

CHAPTER VI
DANIEL'S PORTRAIT
A View of Daniel

The shell.

American flag t-shirt
shorts
tennies.

The boy.

Thin, freckled face,
Inquisitive eyes.
Constantly seeking,
Something.

The desire.

Something to do.
Wear down eraser,
Fray shoelace,
Rock chair,
Read a "funny" book.

Something to share.
This book cracks me up.
Listen to this.
I keep thinking about...

Something to read.
Revenge of the Talking Toilets.

Daniel's interests include everything, and nothing. He talks. I listen. His smiling face and eager tone showcase his joy for telling, so many things to share. His mind

wanders as he talks. Everything reminds him of something else. All are important at this point in time. He is a fourth grade boy.

I navigate my way across the room filled with scattered rows of desks. A dozen third and fourth graders share smiles and hugs as I pass their seats. “Rolly!” Daniel chants. With a broad smile he extends his fist.

“Good morning young man,” I reply, bumping my fist to his. “It is great to see you!” I whisper as I crouch briefly beside his desk.

Concern for his reading ability has brought me here. The concern began to grow in the fourth quarter of third grade. For one, he tested partially proficient on the third grade standardized test. According to teacher’s interpretation of it, he showed proficiency in reading nonfiction texts but partially proficient on the other three sections: fiction, poetry, and vocabulary. Those test scores, a lack of informal reading test results, and his decline of classroom work led his third grade teacher to raise a red flag which instigated talks of remediation and retention. Concerns about his reading ability now linger and hover over him as he wanders through the second semester of fourth grade.

Daniel’s View

Mrs. Read addresses me in response to my emergence. “Good morning Rolly. How are you today?” she asks sincerely.

“I am beautiful!” rings my reply. “Good morning to you!”

She offers a broad smile and continues to lay out her introduction to the 90 minute reading class for her students. She then checks the comprehension of her third graders through questioning while all but one of her fourth graders read silently. Daniel balances his blue mechanical pencil between two fingers.

The third graders begin reading silently as Mrs. Read shifts to checking the comprehension of her fourth graders.

“Daniel, number one, would you please read it and tell us the answer.” she says.

Daniel reads with accuracy and smooth pacing. He reads confidently and offers his response to the question. His answer is incorrect and Mrs. Read politely suggests that he read the question again and then go back to the paragraph to find the correct answer. Several more students are called upon to answer the remaining questions and Daniel follows along. Upon completing the comprehension check, Mrs. Read explains today’s reading tasks as she lists them on the board (See Figure 7.1).

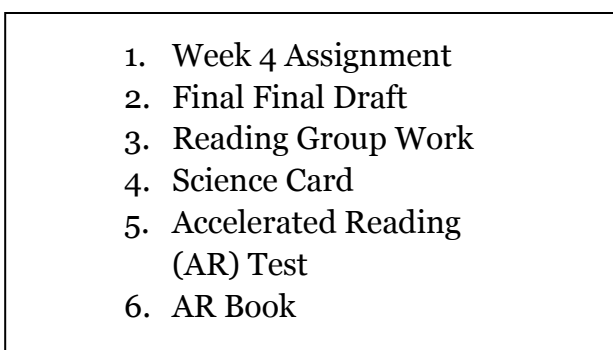
- 
1. Week 4 Assignment
 2. Final Final Draft
 3. Reading Group Work
 4. Science Card
 5. Accelerated Reading (AR) Test
 6. AR Book

Figure 7.1. Reading tasks posted for the class

Mrs. Read disappears from the front of the classroom to prepare for guided reading groups. Like bees around a hive, the third and fourth graders begin to work. Many are reading the paragraphs and answering the aligned questions that make up their Week 4 Assignments. Several are polishing the final drafts of their stories. Some appear to be finished with tasks one and two on the list and focus on their reading group work or scurry across the room to choose a science card to read and answer questions about interesting topics: magnets, chemical reactions, or the weather. It is a routine that the kids attack with familiarity and control.

Daniel notices that the Boys Hall Pass is available on the wall by the door and hastens across the room, turns the pass over, and disappears into the hall. He returns after a few minutes and gets to work at his desk. Daniel jots a few answers in the blanks of his Week 4 Assignment. Of the three sections, which include a paragraph and several questions, Daniel has completed two accurately according to the information contained in the passages. In the third section, Daniel modifies the answer to the question that he answered incorrectly in front of the class when called upon moments ago by Mrs. Read. Although the remaining questions in the third section are incorrect, his smiling face, nodding head, and the care by which he stacks his work on the corner of his desk display his pride for completing the task.

Daniel withdraws his writing assignment from his tidy desk and spends several minutes preparing his final draft. He records the final sentence of his Final Final Draft, stands, walks over to me, and extends it with both hands and a smile.

“What do you think of this?” he beams. “How I Lost a Tooth, by Daniel Stenton.” He hands his perceived masterpiece to me and heads back toward his seat.

Without checking the list on the board he meanders over to retrieve a Science Card. Along the way he stops by several students’ desks to converse with them. After quickly choosing a Science Card, Daniel returns to his seat in the same manner with which he went. Mrs. Read’s call for “Pink Panthers reading group” disrupts his examination of the self-selected glossy full-color folder titled ‘Magnets’.

Although the summons induces a low groan from Daniel, he is one of the first of the ten members in his reading group to position himself on the eight by ten foot world

map rug lying at the feet of his teacher. Mrs. Read's chair is perched in the South Pacific Ocean and Daniel seats himself with crossed legs in the Arctic.

The rest of the group arrives and Mrs. Read begins a vocabulary review to prepare the kids for the text that follows. They view each word, read it together chorally, and identify its root. Daniel views, reads, and identifies right along with them.

"Today we are reading the new book that we briefly previewed last time about hibernation," announces Mrs. Read.

"Oh yeah, I remember this," chimes Daniel with a huge smile. "I remember these pictures." He holds up his book and shows the pictures to his group. His eyes are wide. An elated smile covers his face as he inches forward.

Daniel attends to his teacher's every word. Although he tells me that he likes "domesticated animals like cats and dogs better than wild ones", he shows his curiosity in this topic through his attentiveness and participation. He is asked to begin reading the first paragraph of the new text aloud for the group. Daniel reads the first sentence, miscalls a word, and is quickly corrected by Mrs. Read. After the practice run he tries again, this time accurately, word-for-word. Apparently undaunted by this public lesson on reading accuracy Daniel spawns a question regarding the text.

"I have a question. Do fish hibernate?" he inquires. Several students snicker at the question, and Daniel. "Is that a good question?" he asks, looking around at the smirking faces.

"It is a very good question," Mrs. Read replies. The smirking faces now display respectful admiration.

“I have another question. Well, it is actually a brief statement,” he clarifies. “By my house there is a small lake. It says no fishing. So I am guessing that there are no fish in there.” He continues, “One day, one morning in the summer, I saw a fish actually jump out of the water. It went way up.” He describes the jump with a rising hand and eyes as he speaks.

Daniel’s question and statements inspire a group discussion about whether fish hibernate. The dialogue continues for several minutes and is littered with eager participation by all members of his group. The teacher wraps up the discussion by thanking Daniel for his comments and asking the students what they know about hibernation. Daniel sits silently as the others talk about their background knowledge of hibernation.

Samuel shares, “Bears hibernate through the winter and live off of their fat.”

“Yeah, and snakes hibernate in small dens with lots of other snakes,” adds Cody.

Sally concludes, “They all hibernate because there isn’t much food for them to live off of after it snows so they sleep.”

Daniel sits in silence. His smile and attentive eyes are replaced by a distant gaze and pursed lips.

Mrs. Read prompts the kids to turn to the table of contents to see what their book will be about. “We will be reading about bats,” She says.

Samuel quickly chimes in, “Yep, bats hibernate. I saw that on Animal Planet and read about it too.”

I look up from my researcher journal, across the group of attentive and interested faces. They are anxiously looking through the table of contents and perusing the pictures

to draw out their background knowledge and make predictions. My gaze moves to the Arctic. Daniels sits alone. His brow furrows.

When asked about reading group later he tells me that he wishes that they would read a book that he knows about. “I am excited about our book for next week!” he exclaims. “But I hope that Samuel doesn’t know a lot about it. He knows about everything and, like today, he was just giving away all the things about it,” he continues. He grimaces. “We have had about ten books and I didn’t know about any of them.”

Daniel tells me that the books that they read in reading group are chosen by his teacher from an on-line list. She chooses a different one each time and prints them off for his group.

“Does she ask you what you want to read about?” I inquire.

“She doesn’t ask any of us,” replies Daniel. “She should pop ‘em up and let us see them. Then we choose one, but if each person chooses a different one then we could vote. And, if the vote doesn’t go well, she could just pick one.” Daniel explains. “She should let us choose,” he states, nodding his head. “I want her to ask me if it is a book I know about.”

Daniel’s struggles persist in the next reading group. They have a new book about snow camping. Daniel’s eyes are alert as he studies the pages and the table of contents. His interest is clear but he doesn’t offer any prior understanding of the topic because he hasn’t got any.

Later he tells me, “Well, Samuel didn’t tell us anything because he didn’t know what snow camping was. Finally, a book that he doesn’t know about,” Daniel exclaims! “But Carrie actually went snow camping!” he says with his eyebrows raised. Then his

brow quickly furrows. “She couldn’t answer every question, but she knew every word, what every word meant in the glossary,” he resounds in disgust. His head lowers, his eyes fixed on his fumbling fingers.

“Are there ever stories that you know a lot about?” I ask softly.

After a lengthy pause, without looking up he says, “Um, so far in our reading group, no.” I just wish that we would read a book that I know about because everyone else knows about a book that we read...” His voice trails off. Daniel longs to be the expert for once.

Daniel’s Understanding of Reading

Reading is fun.
 Excellent
 Always fun.
 Do you like reading?
 I like reading.
 No one hates reading.
 Good reading, good job.

Daniel’s poem describes his effort to talk himself into enjoying reading. He tells me that he doesn’t really like reading because he doesn’t like most of the things that he has to read. Furthermore, he doesn’t know about most of the topics that he has to read about.

Daniel uses the color blue to describe reading.

“I would want it to be blue because that is my favorite color. When I blink, everything is blue because it’s my favorite color. Like the song, *blue da bah da...*” His voice trails off as he thinks of the song. He says that the discs of the music that he likes, like this one, have “the words” with them. He uses the words to learn those songs that he likes. He reads the lyrics.

Daniel sees reading as a task. It is a task that he has to do. His mom and his teacher want him to read at home. “We have this reading log. She (Mrs. Read) wants us to read (at home) for twenty minutes a night, or more if we want,” he explains.

“Do you ever read more, for fun?” I ask.

“No,” he quickly replies.

Daniel’s mom gets him books like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Treasure Island* to try to get him to read. He said he never read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

“My mom is making me read this legend called *Treasure Island*. I’m on chapter 11.” He declares. “It’s not that fun.”

To Daniel, the readings that are imposed by his mom and teacher are mainly tasks that need to be completed. Like his reading log at home, he reads what is necessary when it is required and never more than that. He says that he never reads more than the required twenty minutes at home. He usually reads for “maybe nineteen minutes”. He has a timer to keep track.

In school, his view of reading as a task or “assignment” is evident in his daily reading behaviors. When he picks a folder from the science kit, for example, he knows just what to do to get it finished. He explains his process to me. “Well, you just pick something, just pick one. Right now we’re doing physical science and we have a paper size card like this.” He holds up a piece of paper for me as a model. “It flips open like this. Sometimes I don’t read the inside of it. I just do this. I just flip it over and do the answers.” He flips over the paper. He shows me the back of the paper and explains where the questions and answers for self-assessment are located by pointing at it. “I answer the questions first and then I go inside and read it. But I usually don’t read it first.”

“What is the purpose in doing the science kit?” I ask.

Daniel casually answers, “Well, you get a grade on it. You grade it by yourself. Then you turn it in and she (Mrs. Read) puts your grade in the grade book.”

“How do you do on them?” I question.

“I get most of them right.” He replies.

“How are you doing in reading?” I pry.

Daniel gazes off into the distance. His furrowed brow and gritted teeth reveal his bewilderment. He transforms from a happy, smiley kid who is eager to talk into this concerned, ‘struggling’ fourth grade reader. He tells me, “I am now at a second grade reading level. Two years ago, I was at a fourth grade level. My second grade teacher said I was.” He says while nodding. “Then I went to third grade and I was at a third grade level, what I was supposed to be at. And then, now, I’m in fourth grade and I’m still at a third grade level or a second grade level. I just don’t get that.” Daniel says, shaking his head.

In silence, we sit across from one another. Daniel stares at the ground and I scribe in my researcher journal – *Daniel, You are an amazing reader!*

“Are you a good reader? What do you think?” I ask.

“Well, kind of.” He whispers.

I reply, “What do you mean?”

“Well, I just had my parent-teacher conference yesterday. On my reading test it said that I am at a second grade reading level. For some reason, since I have been in fourth grade it (reading ability) has gone down.” He thinks aloud as if talking to himself.

“I just don’t know how I got to a second grade reading level.” The smile that he typically wears is now buried under confusion and sadness.

Patiently, I wait. Then I ask, “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” he replies with a nod, his chin tucked to his chest. I cannot see his eyes.

“What are you going to do about that?” I ask.

“Try to get more reading skills. I’m going to try to get my reading better.” Daniel utters.

“You like to read funny books.” I offer. “Does that help you to become a better reader?”

“Not really,” he says.

“Why not?” I reply quickly.

Shaking his head as he answers, “I don’t know. I just think that.”

“What are you going to do to become a better reader?” I say, but what I want to say is: ***What are you going to do to show that you are a great reader?***

“I don’t know, read at home every night. That’s my mom’s idea.” He shares.

Daniel’s poem below describes his changing understanding of what it means to be a great reader.

What great readers do is,
they practice reading
every night, and,
do questions,
after,
They read the book.

Daniel believes that great readers don’t just read things that they are interested in like “funny” books. They don’t read “easy” picture books either. He says that, “last year I kept reading picture books instead of chapter books, so if I read chapter books this year

maybe I can read Harry Potter books next year like Ashton. He is right there.” He says, pointing to a kid in his class.

During my last visit with Daniel I ask, “What is your favorite thing about reading?”

“Picking out a funny book to read,” He quickly replies.

Then I ask, “What is your least favorite thing?”

He rapidly sounds out, “Reading a non-funny book.”

“What kind of reader are you?” I inquire.

“Uh, a funny book reader,” He says with a partial smile.

Daniel’s Achievements

The struggles that Daniel faces as a reader everyday are real. He struggles to connect to the texts that are offered in reading group because he has no background knowledge of the topics they honor. He struggles to see the value of reading activities that he has to do in class. He sets goals for completing them rather than using them to practice his reading skills and show his understanding of their written messages. He struggles to shine in his learning environment through the sharing of those texts which he is most interested in. He struggles to embrace his interests in funny literature and see himself as an insightful, motivated, and interpretive reader. He struggles to see himself as a great reader. Furthermore, he struggles to reveal his reading strengths through the texts and activities that are offered in school and at home.

The strengths that Daniel possesses as a reader are also real. He desires to read, funny books like *Captain Underpants* and *The Amazing Diaper Baby*. He enjoys reading articles on Yahoo Sports. He can recall details incredibly accurately from those texts that

he finds interesting. Undaunted by a cold read in reading group, he recites for me the six sentence paragraph that he read word-for-word! He offers a play-by-play recap of a tournament basketball game he reads about in *Technical Foul*, by “Rich Wallace”. He speaks rapidly through a broad smile as he retells it.

“I just want to go read it right now!” He exclaims.

He reveals his ability to predict and make inferences as he tells me about what he thinks will happen later in that same book. With inflection, he reads me the back cover as if he were an NCAA basketball announcer. “They are not going to the playoffs.” He predicts. “It (the back of the book) says that the team starts to slip away. Here are the playoffs, they go swoooooosh,” he explains as his hands move outward as if to grab for a lost basketball. “They have one more game to get to the playoffs and they almost win by a point. Then, tweeeeet! They foul. They slip.”

All of this leads me to wonder, will Daniel’s interest in reading slip away like those playoff chances he reads about? Will his joy of reading funny books, chapter books about sports, and easy picture books be lost at the buzzer sounding the end of fourth grade? Has he committed too many technical fouls in the classroom game of reading acquisition? Or will he overcome his dire situation, the decision for him to repeat fourth grade, and be given the inspiration to view himself as a great reader and opportunities to showcase his many reading strengths?

CHAPTER VII

EMMA'S PORTRAIT

A View of Emma

Her long frame
Stretches further,
Wearing high heeled flip flops.

Her exuberant smile
Grows broader,
Talking of choir and boys.

Her wishful eyes
Open wider,
Discussing reading aloud and silently.

Her thoughtful face
Reveals concern,
Sharing her story.

Her shoulder length auburn hair bounces slightly as her long legs stride to meet me at the entrance to her fourth grade classroom. Emma peers up at me from behind her new glasses. She greets me with a toothy smile. As I ask her if she would like to share her reading experiences with me, her eyes showcase her growing attention. I tell her that I am interested in hearing what she has to say about reading. Her eyes widen. They are curious, hopeful. She shares a smile and a little nod.

According to a body of evidence, Emma is a struggling fourth grade reader. Teacher interpretation of scores from informal phonics tests show that she has not acquired the decoding skills requisite of her grade level. Furthermore, teacher interpretation of results from an individually administered standardized reading

test show that she is an “at risk” reader with deficiencies in vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. Based on her classroom reading behaviors Emma’s regular classroom teacher concurs. As a result, Emma receives approximately 11 hours of reading instruction outside of her regular classroom each week.

Emma is pulled out of class for reading intervention daily. As her peers learn about science and social studies every afternoon, Emma receives two hours of scripted reading skill instruction. The intervention focuses on phonics, vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, and reading comprehension with the bulk of the activities addressing decoding, word meanings, and oral reading accuracy.

The supplementary reading class that Emma attends occurs on Friday mornings for approximately forty-five minutes. The teacher of the class provides small group instruction to meet Emma’s regular classroom reading needs. Emma and her nine peers work primarily on vocabulary and comprehension. The students are read to, perform choral and echo reading, practice retelling stories, and participate in read alouds with a partner. All reading activities employ an anthology or a set of leveled texts.

Emma’s View

It is just before one o’clock on a surprisingly warm spring afternoon. The familiar smell of sweaty, hard playing children fills the corridors as the intermediate students return from lunch and their only recess of the day. I plot a course between long lines of melancholy faces. A smile or two lighten my steps as I make my way to Emma’s intervention reading classroom. I let myself into the 10 by 20 foot basement room and fumble for the switch that provides its sole source of lighting. After removing a small chair from a stack in the corner, I strategically plant myself facing the empty chairs

positioned at the five tables clustered in the center of the room. I lay my researcher journal over my knee and begin to write.

Once a full size classroom, it is now cut in half by a permanent wall which rests a few feet behind the row of tables. It extends from wall to wall and floor to one foot short of the ceiling. With no natural light, the fluorescent bulbs struggle to adequately illuminate the learning environment. I write a poem to further describe Emma's intervention classroom.

Picture of a Reading Room

Decorated in diphthongs and digraphs.
Interior designer,
Houghton Mifflin.

Phonics strategies and procedures.
Poignant pink posters for,
Cracking the Code!

A book cart sags.
Weighted with,
A ton of textbooks.

Word
w
a
ll.

Vexing vocabulary,
Portrayed with pictures.

Colored crates containing,
A leveled text set.

A place for
Teaching
reading.

The clock strikes one and Mrs. Craft enters, followed by ten struggling readers. Emma is first. She smiles at me and quickly takes her seat. Conveying smiles of curiosity, the others find their seats as well. They all sit with bright eyes and pert faces, lunch leftovers? Their lesson begins with a question from Mrs. Craft regarding the phrase “for a song”, written on the board. “What does this mean?” she asks.

Emma answers, “It means to confess.”

“Okay, but how does that connect to our story, the one that we read in our last class?” her teacher replies.

“I forget.” says Emma, confused.

“Chang says that he could get his mom a car for a song,” continues Mrs. Craft.

Ezra shouts out, “for almost nothing.”

“Right!” says Mrs. Craft. “He could get it for next to nothing.”

Emma nods and says, “You can’t get toys at Target for a song.”

“How would the opposite be said? What other idiom could you use?” Mrs. Craft says and prompts them for an answer. “Toys at Target cost an ...” In reaction to the bewildered faces Mrs. Craft acts it out by pointing to her arm and her leg.

“Toys at target cost an arm and a leg!” excitedly yells Adell with a huge smile.

Individually, the students spend the next ten minutes writing definitions for the figures of speech listed in their workbooks. Mrs. Craft concludes the lesson by declaring, “This is the type of language that we might see in poetry. Poetry is one of my favorite kinds of writing.” Mrs. Craft hands the overhead with the answers on it to Emma who is the only one yet to finish the assignment. Emma smiles without looking up.

“Let’s go on to page 42 of your anthology,” instructs Mrs. Craft. Several students groan as they open their anthologies and Emma struggles to record the definitions with her pencil resting awkwardly between her pointer and middle fingers.

The rest of the class begins a cold read of the story displayed on page 42. Each student takes a turn reading aloud when Mrs. Craft randomly calls out their name. Their focus is accuracy. Omar makes a self-correction, several uncorrected errors, and an insertion while reading his portion of the text. “Please read that again,” says Mrs. Craft. Omar persists, as do the others when called upon to read aloud, with accuracy.

Upon joining the group Emma is immediately called upon to perform a cold read aloud. Her pace is strong. She reads with few pauses other than those intended by the punctuation. She inserts a word and makes several errors but corrects one. Although her reading is semantically correct, she is asked by Mrs. Craft to “Please read that again.” Determined, she squints at the text and begins again. This time, having had a little practice, she reads every word accurately.

The students persist as the round robin reading continues. Smiling, frowning, and emotionless faces follow along with the text. After completing the passage they begin again. This time they echo read. Mrs. Craft recites a few sentences energetically, fluently. She reads with appropriate pacing, expression, phrasing, and accuracy. In response, an earnest attempt to read the same two sentences together, her students read robotically-without-much-fluency-other-than-accuracy.

“I want you to read with energy!” Mrs. Craft exclaims. Faces droop. Some mouths drop, others purse revealing frustration. Yet, they try again with scrunched brows

of concentration. They struggle together, the ten of them, and follow their teacher through the passage. As a well oiled robot, they finish.

Mrs. Craft leads them through several more activities including: a letter identification drill which includes beginning, middle, and ending sounds, a task requiring them to perform hand motions which represent consonant blends, and a vocabulary activity involving synonyms. Somewhere along the way, a boy who was excused to visit the nurse returns with a note for Mrs. Craft.

“Okay, you will need to go home,” says Mrs. Craft gently.

Many of his peers shout earnestly. “Bye Omar! Goodbye. See you later Omar.”

Emma whispers as Omar reaches the door, “Take me with you.”

Mrs. Craft takes their cue and declares, “It is time to read aloud with a partner.”

No groans follow this announcement. With smiles they energetically find partners and begin.

The announcement inspires me as well. I turn to a fresh page in my researcher journal and describe how I feel in a poem for two voices, mine and Emma’s. (This poem is intended to be read from top to bottom, left to right. The lines mesh together in a volley of dialogue.)

| Me | <i>Emma</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Should I get up to leave? | |
| Slide out. | <i>No, you can't!</i> |
| Glide out. | <i>You</i> |
| Force a smile. | <i>Have</i> |
| Save myself? | <i>To</i> |
| | <i>Stay!</i> |

Maybe, is it the:

Afternoon?
 Basement?
 Confusion?
 Content?
 Contempt?
 Lighting?
 Pace?
 Class size?
 Workbook?
 Lack of reading?

It is the:

*Afternoon
 Length
 Purpose?
 Content
 Lighting
 Pace
 Class size
 Lack of silent reading.*

Should I stay?

Yes! I Need

Tenacity surrounds me
 Like the celebration from a
 Standing ovation.

To Show You

Persistence in abundance.

What I

Impossible effort
 Like an ant carrying a pebble
 Ten times its weight.

Am Capable of!

I sit in awe of your diligence.

I am amazing!

Although Emma says that she feels tired, bored, lazy, and confused during the afternoon intervention class, she tells me that she learns the skills that she needs to become a better, “more fluent” reader in intervention. She also tells me that it will help her to, “read contracts, bills, and other important stuff” when she grows up. Furthermore, she says with a warm smile, “I will be able to read to my children some day.”

Now, it is a Friday morning. The air inside is as crisp and fresh as the late winter air outside the school's red brick walls. I sit in the same classroom waiting, wondering what the nature of this supplementary reading class will be. What will the instruction be like? How will Emma and her classmates react to the learning opportunities provided? What role do Emma and her peers play in their learning of reading, in here?

The door creeeeeks open and draws me from my researcher's journal. I look up and fill with delight. Mrs. Craft and her students stream in wearing beautiful grins accented by brightly shining eyes. In anticipation for today's lesson, their steps are light. They glide across the room to their seats.

Mrs. Craft begins pounding lightly on the table before her with her left hand, a two count beat. The kids peer at her quizzically. With her right hand, she begins tapping a four count beat. The giddy faces of the students reflect her joy. The students continue to study her and several begin mimicking her steady beat with small and awkward hands. Others chime in. The pounding sounds much like a construction framing site. The beats are varied and conflicting. After a brief opportunity to practice, Mrs. Craft instructs gently, "Try to go along with my beat. Watch and listen to the pattern." Soon, with expressions mixed with delight and concentration, the whole group is pounding and tapping to a steady unified beat. "This," declares Mrs. Craft "is rhythm." She points to the board to identify the first vocabulary word written there.

Mrs. Craft rises from her seat and strides to the back of the room as the pounding tapers off. She accentuates her long steps to display the next vocabulary word. "This is a stride," she says as she takes another long smooth step. "Would you like to practice

striding with me?” Racing against Mrs. Craft’s words of invitation, the whole class aligns themselves at the back of the classroom.

Emma’s face shines as she strides around the room behind her teacher. The tallest in the class, Emma is particularly suited for striding and her proud face shows her understanding of this. The celebration of vocabulary learning continues as they act out other vocabulary words: march, cease, and proceed.

Emma and her classmates welcome the active learning opportunity as all participate. The combination of interest and understanding inspire celebratory banter and excited movements. The rarity of this opportunity is evident as their behavior becomes erratic and they begin to bump into one another. Over the laughter and loud voices Mrs. Craft announces, “It is important that you are all able to carefully and respectfully act out the vocabulary if we are going to learn them in this manner.” The students’ untamed behaviors subside while their smiles remain. To their delight they continue to determine and act out the antonyms of the terms just learned.

Student interest continues to be nurtured as they move onto the anthology story which houses their vocabulary words. Mrs. Craft makes a connection to the story before they begin. “This text reminds me of a song that I know. I would sing it but you would want to leave,” she teases.

“Please!” the smiling group chimes in unison. Mrs. Craft blushes, shakes her head, clears her throat, and begins to sing. Most of the students sit with large circular eyes and gaping mouths. Omar and Philippe jump up and run for the door. “Alright, come back here,” says Mrs. Craft laughing.

As Mrs. Craft passes out lined paper to her group of bright-eyed learners, she asks them to read the title and look through the pictures to make a prediction of what they think the story will be about. A few minutes of silence fall over the classroom as their predictions are contemplated and written. Noting that Emma is the only one still writing, Mrs. Craft extends her instructions by asking the others to consider an alternate prediction as well. Emma's frown becomes a smile at being given more time. After Emma finishes, they energetically share their predictions with a neighbor.

Mrs. Craft then begins to read the story aloud to her students while they follow along in their anthologies. After reading several paragraphs Mrs. Craft says, "Let's stop and practice a comprehension skill, making connections, like I did when I told you that the story reminds me of the song which I sang to you."

Emma relates the story to her life as she says, "I have had this happen to me when I was picked for ballet."

"How did that make you feel?" inquires her teacher.

"It felt great!" replies Emma.

The students continue to listen to their teacher read, stopping whenever a student hand shoots up to make a connection. They all listen intently to one another and relish the opportunity to talk about their lives and the text.

Although they previewed the list of vocabulary to build their background knowledge prior to the reading, they stumble upon several new words which cause confusion. When a student requests, Mrs. Craft takes the opportunity to define the word by embedding it in a short narrative. Mrs. Craft then questions their comprehension of the

new word and continues reading the story aloud. Together, in this manner, they traverse the text.

Upon finishing the story, Mrs. Craft and her students arrange themselves into two lines at the edge of the classroom. The students' desire and need to learn actively is obvious. They giggle and smile in anticipation for what is to come.

"What is this?" inquires Mrs. Craft, playing to their interest.

"Conga line retell!" they all shout merrily.

"Yes, and you know what to do," offers Mrs. Craft.

"Yeah," Isaiah calls out. "The person across from us retells the story that we just read. Then, after they are finished, or the time is up, we fill in any details that we notice are missing from their retell."

"Absolutely, well done Isaiah," Mrs. Craft agrees. "Okay, this line will retell first," she declares as she points to the line opposite Emma. "Ready, begin."

Emma's partner includes many details of the story as she describes the characters, setting, and the story's beginning. Time is up, Emma's turn. She adds a quick detail about the main character and continues where her partner left off. She offers several specifics about the problem before running out of time.

"Alright, let's shift our line. Omar, are you ready?" asks Mrs. Craft. Wearing a nervous smile, Omar nods.

"Conga, conga, con-ga! Conga, conga, con-ga! Conga, conga, con-ga!" rings the group. Omar dances his way between the two columns and rests at the opposite end of his line. Across from a different partner, their retells resume. After several conga shifts they complete their detailed accounts of the story.

“Alright, back to business,” says Mrs. Craft warmly. Emma and the other striving students return to their seats to read the story again. This time they read the story chorally, as table groups. In groups of two or three they showcase their ability to read together. It is a pleasure to hear them read together with such fluency. They are progressing! Though the readings are fairly accurate, the beauty sounds in the smoothness of their pacing and the liveliness of their expression. The warm glow of their smiling faces says it all.

As the choral readings conclude, Mrs. Craft offers *her* retell of the story. She stops often to make celebratory references to the retells which the students offered just moments ago. Emma and her classmates accept her praise with round eyes and toothy grins. Nodding, they welcome her model and suggestions for improvement and the forty-five minute supplementary reading class comes to an end.

They close their anthologies reluctantly. Some even take a few more precious moments to look ahead to see what story awaits them next time. These stories are the closest thing that they have to authentic texts. They offer these striving readers hope.

Emma’s Understanding of Reading

Emma sees the beauty in reading. She believes in Mrs. Craft. Emma tells me that, “She is really helping me to become a better reader. She is a very good teacher.” Emma tells me that she is excited to go to reading class in the afternoon because she gets to read out loud and listen to her teacher read from the anthology. In fact, some of Emma’s favorite stories that she excitedly talks about come from the anthology.

When Emma talks about the morning reading class her face glows. “You know how some teachers make learning fun?” she asks me. “Mrs. Craft does that!” Emma tells

me that she “loves” the activities that they do in that class because they help her stay focused by moving around. “Conga line retell is fantastic because it gives me information from the other people in my class.”

Emma explains the importance of the echo and choral reading that she gets to do in both classes. “It helps my reading because I understand the words and where to stop, where to begin.” She says. “I like to hear the words when she (Mrs. Craft) is reading. I also like to hear the words when I am reading to see if they sound right.” she thinks aloud.

“Reading is yellowish green,” Emma declares when I ask her what color she would use to describe reading. “It’s calm and smooth.” In fact, she says that she uses reading to calm her down at night if she can’t go to sleep. “I’ll just read a book until I pass out.” Besides using reading to calm her down, it serves some of Emma’s emotional desires as her poem depicts.

Reading

Reading is sad.
Reading is so emotional.
You can be sad, mad, happy and bad.

Emma expresses her desire to read more to experience these emotions. Her eyes twinkle as she speaks exuberantly about being happy, mad, and sad while reading *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* alone in her room. She speaks of the joy she feels when she listens to the tape of *Tiki Tiki Tembo* with her grandmother. Emma describes the happiness and loneliness that she experiences while reading *Winnie the Pooh* stories to her mother. “I love to read for the whole entire day!” she chimes as she talks about

reading the “embarrassment pages and other stuff” in her magazines. She also expresses her desire to have more of these reading experiences at school.

Emma’s face droops into a frown as she tells me that she can’t bring books like these or magazines to school. “They aren’t allowed,” she whispers as she shakes her head in disbelief. Even if she were allowed to bring them to school she says that she wouldn’t have a chance to read them on her own. Through gritted teeth she says, “Sometimes I ask Mrs. Craft if I can read silently and she says no.” She continues, “She says that she wants us to read with a partner. This makes me feel disappointed and sad.”

Emma’s Achievements

Emma takes risks. She answers questions about reading to share her thinking. Despite the confusion she says that she typically feels her answers are often correct. Undaunted by incorrect responses that she sometimes offers, her desire to be heard drives her to continue to participate.

Emma is driven to become a better reader. She knows what she needs to do to improve. She often says, “I need to read a lot more at home.” In fact, she does most of her reading at home. She knows that using strategies like tracking help her to read more accurately. “I use my finger or a bookmark to point to the words, one-by-one,” she explains while dragging her finger under each word in her poetry journal. She also knows that her reading classes are important. Despite wanting to “fall asleep right there on the ground” she looks forward to what the afternoon intervention class has to offer. She persists.

Emma understands the value of getting a high score on her fluency tests. She strives to reach her reading goal so she can move out of “this low reading group”. She has

recently progressed to a score that teachers use to identify her as having ‘some risk’ on the standardized fluency reading test. “Well I was reading through and I missed one word, one word! I defeated my score. I got a 99,” she cheers through a triumphant smile. As well, Emma showcases her reading ability when given the rare opportunity to read in her regular classroom. “She is far more attentive and shows greater comprehension than many of *my* reading students!” says her regular classroom teacher who instructs the middle reading group.

Emma knows what she needs. She is reading what she likes, at home. She says, “I’m not reading very many chapter books. I feel like chapter books are not my thing anymore. I’m just a regular old school girl.” She needs science and social studies because she says, “I’m good at them and I like them. I can learn to read in science,” she insightfully declares.

Emma expresses how she feels as a reader, as a student. This poem is created from actual statements made by Emma (i.e., found poem) expressing her final thoughts about her reading experiences. The poem offers a contradiction to her ability to see the good in her situation.

I feel...
Not good,
To be down.

It makes my heart feel like
I’m not anything to the world.

I feel like
I’m just a nobody.
Not a somebody.

I feel like,
I’m getting a little bit of help during reading.
But when intervention comes,

I feel like
I'm a nobody
Because,
Nobody cares what I think.
Nobody cares what I say.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Researchers have long advocated for using student voice to help inform the diagnoses of learners struggling to become readers (Clay, 1972; Dewey, 1932; Edwards, 1958; Moller, 1999). Even though some have revealed the significance and potential for using student voice to guide the initial development of reading acquisition (Gaskins, 2005; Veatch, 1996), few have researched the potential for using student voice beyond the initial assessment (e.g. Atwell, 1977, 2007; Durkin, 2005; Lee & Allen, 1963; Stauffer, 1970). Likewise, none have used portraiture methodology to address reading issues. There is a need to understand the experiences and views of striving readers throughout the reading acquisition process as a source for understanding the steps toward remedying a centuries-old problem of struggles in learning to read.

The purpose for this study was two-fold. I aimed to extend the knowledge of striving readers as potential informants of their own learning. I also sought to understand how portraiture methodology might be used to explore the issue of student informed reading acquisition. Two primary questions guided this study. The first focused on student self-reported reading experiences and included four underlying questions. The second question related to methodology and was supported by one underlying question.

- Q1 What are the self-reported experiences of elementary struggling readers regarding their reading acquisition?
- Q2 How might struggling readers guide their reading acquisition process?
- Q3 What control if any may striving readers see themselves having with regard to their reading acquisition in school?
- Q4 How do “struggling readers” define themselves as readers in their school?
- Q5 What do struggling/striving readers view as beneficial to their reading improvement?
- Q6 How might Portraiture advance reading research as it relates to struggling readers?
- Q7 How might striving readers’ views of goodness help to define and guide their reading acquisition?

I investigated the value of self-reports to elicit participant views of their reading needs and explored the potential benefits of using portraiture methodology as a means for illuminating the goodness inherent to striving reader experiences in school. Three fourth grade participants were purposefully selected from one public and two charter elementary schools. Approximately three hours of interviews and 20 hours of observations were completed to collect data from each student over a 12 week period. With the participating students’ teachers, approximately two hours of interview data were collected. I also used artifact gathering and the researcher journal to collect data. The central stories of participants were represented through narratives, found poetry, and participant created poetry.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study pertain to self-reported reading experiences and portraiture methodology. Seven findings relate to student self-reported experiences with reading.

Three pertain to whether or not portraiture methodology might advance reading research as it relates to striving readers. I first discuss the findings that pertain to striving reader experiences and then report the findings associated with portraiture methodology.

Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma are striving readers. But what are the self-reported reading acquisition experiences that shed light on their struggles? Using portraiture methodology and listening to the students' voices, I revealed seven struggles that Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma face. Five are faced by all three participants, while the other two are faced by Lizzy or Daniel individually. Their struggles include:

- Understanding the purpose of reading
- Appropriately defining good reading
- Answering countless questions posed by teachers following reading
- Locating books of interest
- Looking forward to reading texts of which he has little or no background knowledge
- Reading unfamiliar texts aloud
- Showing their skills on formal and informal reading assessments

Understanding the Purpose of Reading

Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma struggle to understand the purpose of reading. Reading is largely seen as necessary for successfully traversing subsequent grades. "Learning to read better will help me prepare for fifth grade." says Lizzy. This is a consistent view offered by all three participants. They almost never speak of the joy of reading or of using reading to gain knowledge. A remedy to this confusion might come from regular experiences and discussions of the many authentic purposes for reading including:

reading for fun, reading to learn about something new, reading to solve a problem, reading to put something together or take it apart, or reading to communicate a message.

For a student to acquire reading, understanding that they have purpose for reading is important (Betts, 1946). Purposes “create the directional motivational influences that get the reader started, keep him on course, and produce the vigor and potency and push to carry him through to the end” (Stauffer, 1969, p. 43) . By exploring, explaining, and setting authentic reading purposes with readers (i.e., reading for fun, reading to solve problems, reading to communicate, etc.), teachers allow readers like Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma to see the importance of reading and its potential applications to their daily lives.

Appropriately Defining Good Reading

Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma struggle to appropriately define good reading. “Good readers read fluently, fast. Reading is like running, the faster you run the better you are.” said Emma. In fact, all three participants defined good reading as *fast reading*. They often pointed out peers who could read fast and finish many books and referred to them as *good readers*. They also believed that certain types of books are read by good readers. Lizzy told me, “I feel like a good reader when I finish a big chapter book.” Daniel echoed by saying, “I have been trying to read harder chapter books like Harry Potter. Soon I will be able to read other big books like Jason, he’s a kid in my class.” Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma have limited views of reading. In order for these three readers to accelerate their growth, they need to expand their views.

As they strive to become good readers, knowing what it means to be one is essential. What do good readers do? Good readers use a variety of comprehension strategies (i.e., inferencing, making connections, visualizing, using text structures, etc.) as

they navigate texts (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Pressley, 2002). Without a clear target, readers like Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma expend immense amounts of time and energy in pursuit of futile goals like fast reading. In turn, their effort is often misguided, unseen, or unrewarded. They continue to be labeled *struggling*.

*Answering Countless Questions
Posed by Teachers
Following Reading*

Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma struggle to answer countless questions asked by their teachers following reading. A daily ritual for all three participants included reading and then answering questions. Lizzy in particular says that she would like to “read for once without answering all of the questions after. Or, we could at least answer the questions that I already have from reading, my questions.” Lizzy and Emma reluctantly answered the questions following their readings but did so with honest effort. Daniel on the other hand did not. He had devised a system where he would rely on the key for answers or just respond with any answer that seemed plausible. According to Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma there are three simple solutions to this issue including: limiting the number of questions after readings, allowing them the opportunity to read without questioning once in a while, and letting them create and answer their own questions.

In an effort to provide a clear target for reading comprehension development, many reading researchers have concluded that questioning is worthy of student and teacher attention (Guthrie, 2004). However, not all forms of questioning are equally supportive of comprehension growth in students. Student generated questions in particular have been found to be highly supportive of reading comprehension ability (Allington, 2006; Pressley, 2002). Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma repeatedly expressed the

desire to answer their own self-generated questions about a text they've read rather than those offered by their teachers. The comprehension needs of these readers prove to have been issues of disinterest rather than inability.

Locating Books of Interest

Lizzy struggles to locate books of interest. Lizzy rarely finishes a book. She said, "I just get bored with them and quit." Lizzy also said that the books that she had been reading were too long because they include too many elaborate descriptions of the characters and settings. This is what often turned her off to books. On the rare occasion that Lizzy does locate a book that peaks her interest, her passion wanes as chapters pass and she abandons it. Most of the time, these books are offered to her by others. "Oh, you will love this book!" they say. But, nine out of ten books are abandoned within the first few chapters.

According to researchers like Atwell (2007) and Wutz and Wedwick (2008), readers like Lizzy need to be given choice and be *taught* how to pick out an appropriate book. By providing these supports, Lizzy is more likely to begin to devour books that hold her interest and showcase her reading strengths along the way.

*Looking Forward to Reading Texts of
which they have Little or No
Background Knowledge*

Daniel struggles to look forward to reading texts for which he has little or no background knowledge. He said, "I just wish that I could read a book that I know about for once in reading group." He went on to say, "I wish she [his teacher] would let us pick the stories that we want to read."

Reading about familiar topics allows readers to use their reading skills and sharpen them without worry of accumulating new knowledge. Anderson and Pearson (1984) suggested that a reader's prior knowledge (i.e., schema) affects his/her understanding of what is read. When a reader like Daniel reads about a topic of familiarity, his confidence as a reader is nurtured by his understanding of the content. By nurturing his reading confidence, supporting his reading skills, and adding to his reading strategies, new information can gradually be accumulated. But too much new information leaves readers like Daniel feeling overwhelmed and left to struggle.

Many options exist for meeting Daniel's request. Using clusters of different texts that cover the same topics would allow him to gain background knowledge over time. Or simply allowing him to choose texts used in reading groups would permit him to buy-in and to showcase his knowledge of particular topics like basketball or gold with peers.

Reading Unfamiliar Texts Aloud

I observed Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma struggling to read unfamiliar texts aloud during round robin reading. Their cold reads were often cumbersome and choppy. But, when given the chance to reread a text or practice it before reading aloud all three showed their skills to read with accuracy, proper pacing, expression, and appropriate phrasing as dictated by the punctuation (i.e., fluency).

Confidence and familiarity are keys to using oral reading to teach striving readers. As stated by Opitz and Rasinski (1998), "it [oral reading] must be done for specific, authentic purposes: to develop comprehension, to share information, to determine strategies students use in reading, and to help a struggling reader achieve greater fluency" (p. 9). Oral reading is not the goal itself. When using it to support striving readers, oral

reading must be used only after students familiarize themselves with a text by reading it silently. The benefits are confidence, abundant practice reading, and greater opportunities for readers to showcase their skills. Allowing these readers to practice reading a text before reading it aloud would allow them to show their true fluency strengths and needs.

Showing their Skills on Formal and Informal Reading Assessments

Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma struggle to show their skills on formal and informal reading assessments. Due to the previously mentioned needs and mismatched assessments, these three readers are viewed as struggling. However, if given the opportunity to read texts of interest and familiarity, Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma could display their fluency, comprehension, and reading vocabulary skills as they had done for me repeatedly.

Opportunities for readers to showcase their skills must be authentic and ongoing. Reading diagnosis needs to occur throughout the day as informal formative assessments or summative benchmark tests. In either case, an assessment is only useful if it reveals the nature of the reading behaviors targeted. The data collected during a reading assessment must be questioned to determine validity before inferences are made (Rubin & Opitz, 2007). The data collected from a particular assessment must be compared with the other forms of data collected (i.e., body of evidence) to describe a reader's ability. Furthermore, the true nature of a reader's ability can be revealed through the appropriate use of reading assessments.

Conclusion

Self-Reported Experiences of “Struggling” Readers

In my experience as an educator for the past twelve years, students are *labeled* in an effort to identify their strengths and needs and to appropriate instruction for them. All too often, though, the means for identifying the strengths and needs of readers provide limited data about the complex set of skills they use. As is the case here, the needs of Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma are superficial. For example, their teachers identified three needs in particular including: limited understanding of vocabulary in unfamiliar texts about unfamiliar topics, inability to read a specific number of grade appropriate words accurately in one minute, and limited ability to accurately answer inferential and literal comprehension questions pertaining to arbitrary leveled passages. However, these teacher identified needs are not proof of reading struggles nor are they conclusive. They are in fact evidence that background knowledge, practice, and interest are requisite for readers to show their actual reading abilities. The superficial struggles of Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma are actually indicators of inappropriate, overly trusted, and misaligned reading instruction and assessments.

Appropriate reading assessments can be better understood by paying attention to student voice. That is, an assessment’s value lies in paying less attention to student outcomes in isolation and greater attention to the congruence of such outcomes with student views. Consequently, the views of Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma are offered here to illuminate the value of student voice as a guide for reading instruction and assessment. The participating student views include: definitions of themselves as readers, perceived

control of reading acquisition, benefits of learning experiences, and ideas for improving reading experiences in school.

How do “struggling” readers define themselves as readers in school? Lizzy says that she is a “pretty good reader.” She also says, “I would describe myself as a hard worker trying to read harder books. Sometimes I don’t read them and sometimes I quit because I think it is going to take too long.” Lizzy blames the author when she is compelled to give up on a boring book. “They should know that the reader might not like this,” she says, describing the detailed descriptions that many books include. Although Lizzy struggles to see herself as a competent reader in school, she says that she feels like a strong reader when she finishes a chapter book and exclaims, “Yay, I finished it! I feel like I am a good reader.”

Daniel’s face illustrates his confusion as he talks about being in fourth grade and apparently reading at a second grade level. He is confused because he says, “I used to read at a fourth grade level when I was in second grade. I don’t know how this happened.” His furrowed brow and drooping face tell all as he says, “I think, thought, I was a good reader.” At times Daniel tells me that if he keeps reading chapter books he will soon read even harder books like his peers. Most often Daniel tells me that his favorite part of reading is picking out a funny book and that he is a “funny book reader”.

When asked what kind of reader she sees herself as Emma casually replies, “A level one I think because that is the lowest one”. She says that she has trouble “hearing” all of the words and likes the environment to be silent so she can hear herself read and correct herself. She claims to be a “listening reader”. She says, “I am good at letting the

teacher read to me. That helps me understand the story a little bit more.” Emma further declares, “I am a listening reader because I listen to tapes, books on tape, with the book.”

What control if any may striving readers see themselves having with regard to their reading acquisition in school? Lizzy’s eyes grow into large round circles as she tells me about her teacher asking her what she thinks about doing classroom reading activities. Lizzy says that she explains to her teacher, “I like reading some of the stories but it is not fun to answer the questions.” Her teacher responds by limiting the number of questions following the next reading. With sparkling eyes and a broad smile Lizzy says, “It makes me happy to talk to the teacher so she can understand how I feel.” Having the opportunity to choose her book for the 15 minutes of silent reading each day delights her as well. With a toothy smile she says, “I like it because you get to read the things that you want to read!”

Daniel usually gets the opportunity to pick out books that he likes for silent reading. Therefore, he regularly chooses books like *Captain Underpants*, *Sponge Bob Square Pants*, comic books, books about basketball, or nonfiction topics that he already knows a lot about. He says, “I really don’t enjoy school. The reason why I like school *sometimes* is because I can check out a funny book.”

Emma has the opportunity to read what she would like occasionally during the last half hour of the school day (reserved for all non-curricular activities). She may choose from a small collection of ‘real books’ that are available in the classroom or the library book she has chosen freely during her bi-weekly visit. At home Emma chooses to read a wide variety of texts, of which she is not allowed to bring to school.

What do striving readers view as beneficial (i.e., goodness) to their reading improvement? Lizzy likes going to her intervention class to learn reading. She explains, “It helps me with learning because it explains the rules of reading.” She also celebrates the slower pace and appreciates the opportunity to read stories “again and again.” Furthermore, she shares her delight at the rare opportunities to play games in reading class “without all of the questions that make it seem like just another test,” she says. She also says that getting the opportunity to “talk about what we want to talk about” in literature circle groups allows her to learn from her peers and share how she feels! Most importantly, Lizzy relishes the attention that her reading teacher gives her and exclaims, “They (her teachers) want us to be better readers. They care about us.”

Daniel looks forward to his reading group, particularly when they are getting a new book. He looks forward to the opportunity to read a book about a topic that he knows a lot about. Yet again, he shares his delight when he talks about giving presentations because he loves picking his research topic and “becoming the expert on it.”

Emma adores and trusts her reading teacher. She looks forward to the lessons that she will be taught in reading class because she says, “I want to become a better reader when I grow up.” She tells me that not many of the activities that she does in reading class are fun, but they are necessary for her to “become a more fluent reader”.

How might striving readers guide their reading acquisition processes? Lizzy believes that she should be able to “give up on a book”. She should be able to read silently, without discussion or questions afterward. She believes that she should get to choose *any* book to read for literature circles and summer reading. She questions, “What if I don’t want to read any of the books that I have to choose from?” She also wishes that,

in literature circles, she could talk about whatever she finds interesting. Furthermore, Lizzy expresses the desire to have more teacher-modeling and review of skills so that she “understands the rules of reading better”. But the repetitive refrain which surfaced again and again throughout our time together, her greatest desire, was to “have more time to read.”

Daniel believes that he should be able to pick the book used for reading group or at least “vote on it”. By choosing the book, he says that he “could answer all of the questions and would know all of the words without looking at the glossary”. He could be “the expert for once”. He also believes that he should get to read funny books whenever he wants. He should be able to tell his classmates about those books because they are so hilarious. “They might want to read them,” he concludes.

Emma is the quintessential cheerleader. She speaks with optimism even when she tells me about her least favorite reading activities, the ones that make her want to “fall asleep right there on the ground”. She does feel however, that reading should be a lot more fun. She would like the lessons to be “active” and allow her to get up out of her seat and “at least stretch”. She believes that she should be able to have more time for completing assignments in class, especially those involving writing. Emma would also like her teacher to allow her to read silently. Above all, Emma voices her desire to attend the classes (i.e., science and social studies) that she misses to attend reading intervention. She says, “I love science and am good at it! I can learn how to read in science.”

Value of Portraiture Methodology

Portraiture is the seeking of goodness. The portraitist strives to collect evidence of the promise and potential of a social context by applying a personal form of research to

personal situations. Determined to seek the goodness inherent to the striving elementary reader situation, I set out to sift through the actors' daily reading experiences and perceptions to discover the beauty there, much like a pan handler sorts through the lackluster grains of earth to uncover a precious bit of gleaming gold.

With certainty, I can say that I have struck gold! Portraiture methodology proved extremely valuable for illuminating the issues surrounding "struggles" in reading acquisition. Three benefits of using portraiture methodology and focusing on goodness that emerged from this study include:

1. Inspiration for the researcher
2. Acceptance
3. Positive impact on participating teachers

Portraiture methodology offers inspiration for the researcher. Educational research can be an intimidating prospect for the novice researcher, especially when attempting immersion in an elementary classroom. Researching striving elementary readers can be difficult for four particular reasons. First, children are seen as a sensitive population and protected from undue stresses like those typically associated with research. Second, striving readers are a highly researched group which makes those charged with their protection weary of researcher intrusions in the classroom. Third, parents may be leery of individual contact between an adult researcher and their child. Finally, some teachers may feel apprehensive about investigations of their students' shortcomings and become defensive as student needs are connected with teaching inadequacies. Although these issues plagued my thoughts and dominated my writings in my researcher journal, they were all remedied by using portraiture methodology.

A novice researcher, I rapidly gained confidence during my approach to the field. As I anxiously revealed my interests and intent to district and school gatekeepers, I rapidly gained confidence and understood the potential of using portraiture methodology in educational research. Although I had been told that access to the school district would be incredibly difficult for a variety of reasons, after hearing my proposal to use portraiture methodology to seek practices that work for striving readers, district and school gatekeepers offered their full support. One principal commented, “We look forward to having you conduct your research here and anxiously anticipate your findings.” Portraiture proved to be the key to accessing these otherwise impenetrable learning environments.

Portraiture was the key to my acceptance into these educational settings. I had initially learned what it would take to gain acceptance into a heavily researched school district and its elementary classrooms by reading *Beyond Bias: Perspectives on Classrooms* (Carew & Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1979). I labored to design my approach to the educational field with clear and complete transparency as a result of reading about Carew and Lawrence-Lightfoot’s lesson learned regarding disclosure and honesty to gatekeepers and potential participants. Not only did the positive nature of portraiture nurture the possibility of being accepted by gatekeepers and potential participants, the honest and respectful relationships I developed with participants played a prominent role in the outcome of the study.

With the seeking of goodness and “what works” as my guides, teachers welcomed this research with open arms. One teacher stated, “How refreshing to get a study that showcases what works for struggling readers!” Not only that, but parents expressed

emphatic attention as well. Lizzy's mom said, "I look forward to learning more about my daughter as a reader and identifying what will help her to improve." Most importantly, the students showed genuine interest in participating in the portraiture study. Emma said, "I like the chance to tell you what I think about reading in school." Lizzy explained as well, "I like telling you how I feel about reading." Daniel's face lit up at the opportunity to finally tell someone about the Captain Underpants books that he loves. "Listen to this!" he often told me.

One of the most powerful outcomes of this research endeavor was its positive impact on participating teachers. They reflected on the opportunity to share their thinking with someone and cast a critical gaze over their own teaching practices. Through this process, they began articulating their thoughts about improving their teaching practices and listening to students.

Mrs. Key often drifted off in thought as I would share what Lizzy had been telling me about reading, returning shortly to say, "I think I know what I am going to do now. After listening to you I have some ideas that I think I'll try." She would immediately make plans and attempt her new teaching strategy/reading activity. She would then share her delight or confusion after giving it a try.

After reading Daniel's story Mrs. Read reflected that she would give him more guidance. She decided to assist Daniel as he approached many classroom reading tasks as things that simply needed to be completed. She shared her plans for emphasizing the purpose of those activities and the reading benefits to be gained. She concluded, "I need to give Daniel more direct instruction in reading."

Mrs. Craft showed the greatest change. She was appalled at herself for sticking to the curriculum when her students clearly showed a thirst for change. Mrs. Craft offered her epiphany, “I wish I would have been stronger, that I would have broken more rules, that I would have had more courage to do right by my students. That is my big lesson.”

Implications

How might portraiture enhance striving reader research and in turn benefit teachers, inspire policy makers, and guide researchers alike? The insight gleaned as a result of this portraiture study and the call for using portraiture methodology to further enhance reading research follows.

Implications for Teachers

Portraiture methodology can be used to assess the validity of teacher identified student needs and to reveal the personal learning needs of striving readers. With respect to the information collected from Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma regarding their personal reading needs, I offer Pennac’s (2006) *Rights of the Reader* to provide a synthesized view of the data collected using portraiture methodology and student self-reports. According to Pennac, readers have ten inalienable rights. They include:

1. The right not to read.
2. The right to skip.
3. The right not to finish a book.
4. The right to read it again.
5. The right to read anything.
6. The right to mistake a book for real life.
7. The right to read anywhere.

8. The right to dip in.
9. The right to read out loud.
10. The right to be quiet. (p. 135)

I think about these rights in my own reading. Rarely do I come across a text that doesn't require me to skip a portion, or two. I have certainly chosen to abandon a book that does not keep my interest or meet my needs. Without question, I have honored myself by choosing not to read or to repeatedly read anything that interests me, anywhere. I would sooner forfeit my teaching career if told that I couldn't read aloud (after practicing), and I reserve the right to relish a text on my own, without offering a verbal response. Do Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma deserve these rights? Of course they do!

As I delve into Pennac's (2006) text for the second time I can't help but consider just how obvious these rights are. They are common sense. I say aloud, "Of course, these are signs, no, *reasons* for enjoying reading. Reading is liberating. These rights make it so."

Perhaps the most difficult right for me to deal with is *the right not to read*. At the thought of this choice I cringe, gasp, and guffaw nervously. Then I ask myself aloud, "Have I ever taken a hiatus from reading? Of course I have!" I shout at myself laughing.

The rights of the reader make more sense to me as I examine my own reading behaviors. In the least, this list makes me rethink my motives for offering and assigning the texts that I do. On a grand scale, the list reminds me to *ask* my students what they think regularly and to *listen* to what they have to say.

Policy Implications

Portraiture methodology can be used to understand the implications of educational policy and advocate for striving readers. It enables interested others to learn of striving readers perspectives on reading acquisition. When it comes to federal and state policy, striving readers are at the mercy of “reading experts.” I present three poems to showcase the importance of policy *and* student voice as efforts are made to relinquish reading struggles. The first two poems include some verses created by me and specific wording drawn from the National Reading Panel (NRP) report and the federal educational policies outlined in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal documentation. Both policy documents, although rigorously developed by teams of field professionals, are grossly limited since they have no mention of the use of the child’s views to enhance reading growth. The views of children are simply left out. In response, I offer a modified version of the Rights of the Reader (2006) crafted from statements made by Lizzy, Daniel, and Emma.

NRP Soliloquy

The exhaustive goal
Of the NRP,
To understand reading
Through scientific study.

Many topics adopted,
Found worthy.
Teacher ed., computer tech.
Comprehension, fluency.

Significant conclusions
For teachers were reached.
While the insightful views
Of children were breached.

Great information,
When writing summative news.
Useless information,
When neglecting a child's views.

Serving Children

No Child Left Behind.
The federal role in education
Is not to serve the system.
It is to serve the children *to the system*.

The Rights of the Reader

1. "I'm a listening reader."
2. "Sometimes I read really fast just to get through the boring parts."
3. "I just want to quit reading it."
4. "That part cracks me up so I read it over and over again."
5. "I love to read magazines, the embarrassment pages."
6. "It would have been cool to live in the time of dragons."
7. "I asked her if I could read silently at the end of intervention and she said no."
8. "Look at this page! These two just changed the sign to: PLEASE EAT MY PLUMP JUICY BOOGERS."
9. "I like to read out loud so I can hear my own voice and fix the words that are incorrect."
10. "I like the stories. I just don't like answering the questions after reading them."

The professional and federal viewpoints are noteworthy representations of the critical components for learning how to read as is Daniel Pennac's (2006) *Rights of the Reader*. However, one should not exist without the other. Each takes only half of the story into consideration. As a result of this study, it is clear that striving readers have a lot to offer when it comes to guiding their reading acquisition. Therefore, by honoring the views of the reader, using the reader's rights as common sense reminders, and referring to the systematic findings of reports like that of the NRP, struggles in reading will finally cease to exist.

Recommendations for Future Research

Portraiture can be used to promote researcher access, nurture participant/researcher relationships, and to empower participants. As a result, researchers should continue to use portraiture methodology to explore the experiences of striving readers. Furthermore, this methodology seems to be well suited for researchers intending to explore the experiences of other readers.

Three Pivotal Follow-Ups to this Study

Knowing the goodness and potential of portraiture methodology, those seeking a greater understanding of striving readers and reading growth need to continue using it with primary readers, diverse students, and advanced readers.

Using portraiture methodology with striving readers in the primary grades is a necessary and viable way to explore the onset of students' reading difficulties in school as well as their perspectives on reading. Davis (2007) found that seven and eight-year-old children provided valuable insights about their reading dislikes through the telling of stories. Much like the unstructured nature of interviewing used in this portraiture study of striving fourth grade readers, Davis used the storytelling method to gather credible accounts of primary readers' experiences. By focusing on the primary grades, the portraitist has the potential to add to the list of "what works" for striving readers and provide primary grade teachers the necessary insight for meeting the articulated needs of their striving readers.

The importance for understanding striving readers of varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds is critical as teachers strive to accelerate all readers' abilities. As Crawford and Krashen (2007) attested, students from minority groups who strive to learn to read

have needs that vary from mainstream striving readers. By using portraiture methodology to investigate the perceptions and experiences of diverse students, the field of education might be reminded once again that the key to meeting the needs of the struggling reader is to treat each as an individual informant on his/her own reading situation.

The potential for satisfying the needs of readers should not stop at those who struggle. What about readers who have been labeled *advanced*? How might we teachers go about accelerating their reading abilities and broadening their reading desires? The obvious solution, use portraiture methodology and student self-report to elicit advanced readers' views just as is has been done here with striving readers.

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Figure 4.5 Notes

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APPENDIX A
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definition of Terms

Self-reporting. Information provided by the student about his/her reading experiences and perceptions.

Self-efficacy. An individual's belief that he/she has the ability to accomplish specific goals.

Reading Acquisition. The process for developing skills, strategies, and behaviors necessary for making sense of a text through reading.

Struggling Reader. A reader who appears to have limited skills in reading, limited knowledge of reading strategies, or limited reading ability. This term is used throughout this dissertation to portray a negative context for reading and is used to showcase the needs and limited ability of the reader.

Striving Reader. A resilient reader who continues to work toward reading acquisition regardless of the persistent failures or hindrances. This term is used throughout this dissertation to portray a positive and optimistic context for learning to read. The term is used to illustrate the tenacity and illuminate the strengths of the reader.

Open Coding. The initial process for identifying themes or categories in newly collected data.

Axial Coding. The later process for sorting and understanding qualitative data involving the merging of similar themes and categories.

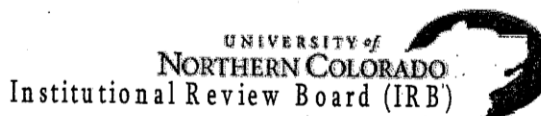
Inductive Analysis. Sifting through pieces of qualitative data in an effort to draw some general conclusions. For example, a multiple case researcher may elicit data that is consistent between participants and offer a group explanation for a shared behavior or experience.

Deductive Analysis. The process of breaking down groups of collected data (i.e., an interview transcript or observational notes) to identify bits of information that attend to the research questions.

Found Poetry. Poetry created by taking parts of existing text from obtainable documents (i.e., reports, articles, interviews, etc.) and restructuring them. The process may solely include the text found in the document or may include additions from other sources (i.e., observational notes, researcher journal, etc.).

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH LETTER FROM
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)



October 8, 2008

STUDENT'S COPY

TO: John Latham
 MCB

FROM: Teresa McDevitt, Co-Chair *TM*
 UNC Institutional Review Board

RE: Expedited Review of Proposal, *The Voices of Striving Elementary Readers: Portraiture in Struggling Reader Research*, submitted by Roland Schendel (Research Advisor: Maria Lahman)

First Consultant: The above proposal is being submitted to you for an expedited review. Please review the proposal in light of the Committee's charge and direct requests for changes directly to the researcher or researcher's advisor. If you have any unresolved concerns, please contact Teresa McDevitt, School of Psychological Sciences, Campus Box 94, (x2482). When you are ready to recommend approval, sign this form and return to me.

I recommend approval as *John Latham* *Oct 22, 2008*
 Signature of First Consultant Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is approved as proposed for a period of one year: *10/11/2008* to *11/11/2009*.

Teresa McDevitt *11 Nov 08*
 Teresa McDevitt, Co-Chair Date

Grey Hase *CONTINGENT ON SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL.

Comments: *Teachers? Observations of kids w/ no writing? District Approval? emailed 4 Nov 08*

APPENDIX C
SAMPLE OF THE CODING PROCESS

Sample of the Coding Process

Sample Coding Process for Lizzy's Portrait

| Open Coding - Emergent Themes from Interview Data | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| Interests | Effort | Support | Problem | Purpose | Achievement |
| "I was answering. I was a lot more talkative because I got to say whatever I wanted. There was a lot of stuff that I would say because the story was exciting." | "I am a hard worker trying to read harder books." | "Sometimes she (reading teacher) asks what I think about doing this. That kind of made me happy so I can talk to the teacher so they can understand." | "Sometimes I just say that I want to read this book the whole time. They say no you need to learn. We just have to put away the book but still I want to go on reading." | "I think reading well is a little more important and reading speed maybe just helps you get through quicker." | "Sometimes I am just reading and I am like, I don't even know what is happening in this sentence." |
| "I like silent reading because I get to get on with my book because it is really good." | "Sometimes when you read you think it is kind of hard and when you get into it, it's really easy." | "My teachers want me to be a good reader like they are." | "My goal is too high. I wish I didn't have to go for so many points on my quizzes on the computer." | "We just need to know the story so we get all of the words right." | "When there is a boring part of my story, I just read a little faster to get done with it (the boring part)." |
| "I choose books by what the cover looks like and how funny it looks." | "Sometimes I make goals like to read until this page or to finish this book no matter what." | "I read every night at home and talk about the books that I read with my mom." | "I get to read maybe 15 or 20 minutes each school day." | "My strength is to read a lot of chapter books." | "When I get bored, I think it is the author's fault. They should know that the reader might not like this." |
| Axial Coding – Blending Emergent Themes – Portrait Frame | | | | | |
| <i>View of Lizzy</i> | <i>Lizzy's View</i> | <i>Lizzy's Understanding</i> | <i>Lizzy's Achievement</i> | | |

APPENDIX D
TENTATIVE RESEARCH SCHEDULE

Tentative Research Schedule

October - December

- 1st week of study: Submit Institutional Review Board (IRB) application.
- 3rd week: Identify three elementary schools with varying reading curriculum.
- 4th week: Approach school district with overview of study, full disclosure of the intended research, and proposal to conduct research.
- 5th week: Approach each of three elementary school principals with overview of study, full disclosure of the intended research, and proposal to conduct research. Request the contact information for potential 4th grade teacher participants.
- 6th week: Approach teachers with overview of study, full disclosure of the intended research, and request for their participation. Conduct teacher email interview. Request teacher consent to participate and identify teacher participants. Request names and contact information of potential participating students. Students were identified by their teachers using a body of evidence revealing struggles in reading and student propensity to speak about their reading experiences in school.
- 8th week: Two students and their parents from each of the three schools were contacted. Each was provided with an overview of study and full disclosure of the intended research, and parent consent and student assent to participate were requested. All six students and their parents agreed to become possible participants.
- 10th week: One student from each site was purposefully chosen as the primary participant based on his/her defined reading struggles according to the body of evidence and his/her willingness to participate. Arrangements to conduct interviews and observations were scheduled to begin the first week of the spring semester.

January - March

- 1st week: Conduct first classroom observation followed by student interview. Conduct first in-person teacher interview about student participant.
- 2nd – 11th weeks: Continue observations. Conduct semi-structured and unstructured interviews with student participants. Collect artifacts that are used in reading instruction, practice, and assessment. Conduct member

checks of data previously collected. Begin collecting participant created poetry in the 7th week of data collection.

- 12th week: Conduct final observation of student participant and follow-up interview. Conduct final teacher interview.
- 20th week: Conduct follow-up interview with each student participant to clarify themes emerging from data and to conduct member checks.
- 28th week: Provide copies of portraits to students, their families, and teachers for member checking.

APPENDIX E
INITIAL TEACHER INTERVIEW

Initial Teacher Interview

(Interview questions administered to each teacher intended for acquiring information explaining the reading environment of his/her classroom.)

- Demographic information:
 - Years of teaching experience -
 - Years at present school –
 - Current grade level -
 - Years at current grade level -
- When and why did you become a classroom teacher?
- Tell me about your teaching philosophy.
- What does it mean to be a struggling reader?
- In your classroom, which activities do your struggling readers participate in?
- What do you do to create an environment that promotes your struggling reader's success?
- How do your struggling readers feel about the reading activities that they are involved in within your classroom?

APPENDIX F
STUDENT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Student Interview Script

Individual Semi-structured 20 minute Interview Topics and Questions:

- Tell me about yourself as a reader.
- Tell me about your favorite reading activities in school.
- Why do you feel this way?
- Tell me a story that shares how reading makes you feel good about yourself.
- Subsequent follow-up and clarifying questions

Second Individual Semi-structured 20 minute Interview Topics and Questions:

- What reading experiences in school frustrate you?
- Tell me about those frustrations.
- Tell me a story about being frustrated or confused during a reading activity in school.
- What changes would have allowed you to feel good about yourself as a reader during that reading experience?
- Subsequent follow-up, probing and clarifying questions

Follow-Up Individual Semi-structured 20 minute Interview Topics and Questions:

- How do you feel about yourself as a reader?
- How could you become a better reader?
- Tell me a story about a time when your teacher asked you about your views of reading.
- How did your teacher use what you said to teach you to read?
- How could your teacher help you to become a better reader?
- What advice would you give your teacher about teaching you to read?
- Subsequent follow-up, probing and clarifying questions