THE POWER OF LITERACY: SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THEMSELVES AS LITERATE BEINGS

by

STEPHANIE K. MCNEMAR

B.S., Kutztown University, 1998
M.Ed., Loyola College in Maryland, 2003

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2015

Abstract

This phenomenological case study focuses on three secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves and their lived experiences. The purpose of this study is twofold: First, to understand how secondary special education students perceive themselves as literate beings; and second, to illuminate how secondary special education students understand what it means to be literate and how their lived experiences have shaped their perceptions of being literate. Based on qualitative data, such as, interviews, observations, questionnaire, and a qualitive analysis method, called Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, I have identified three themes of the lived experiences of the participants: 1) Students' stability and/or instability of their lived experiences influenced their literacy practices; 2) Being identified as special education students did not prevent them from being literate; and 3) Different lived experiences led to different literacy practices.

Based on these themes, I provide implications for educators and policy makers including: understanding secondary special education (SSE) students as literate beings; valuing the varied experiences that SSE students bring to classrooms; capitalizing on SSE students' self-efficacy and resilience to promote students' literacy; respecting SSE students' literacy skills on out-of-school literacy; paying attention to the personal dimensions of literacy practices to meet the needs of the diverse learners; allowing SSE students to demonstrate their literacies in multiple ways; and collaborating between general education and special education teachers to benefit all students.

The significance of this study resides in that it focuses on the literacy practices of secondary special education students, whose voices have been largely missing in the literature. This understanding of the voice and the lived experiences that secondary special education

students bring to the classroom will help educators, policy makers, and curriculum writers find ways to better serve special education students. In so doing, this study reconceptualizes the power of literacy that needs to be fostered in SSE students, so that they can succeed not only in college and career but also in their personal lives.

THE POWER OF LITERACY: SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THEMSELVES AS LITERATE BEINGS

by

STEPHANIE K. MCNEMAR

B.S., Kutztown University, 1998
M.Ed., Loyola College in Maryland, 2003

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2015

Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Jeong-Hee Kim

Copyright

STEPHANIE K. MCNEMAR

2015

Abstract

This phenomenological case study focuses on three secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves and their lived experiences. The purpose of this study is twofold: First, to understand how secondary special education students perceive themselves as literate beings; and second, to illuminate how secondary special education students understand what it means to be literate and how their lived experiences have shaped their perceptions of being literate. Based on qualitative data, such as, interviews, observations, questionnaire, and a qualitive analysis method, called Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, I have identified three themes of the lived experiences of the participants: 1) Students' stability and/or instability of their lived experiences influenced their literacy practices; 2) Being identified as special education students did not prevent them from being literate; and 3) Different lived experiences led to different literacy practices.

Based on these themes, I provide implications for educators and policy makers including: understanding secondary special education (SSE) students as literate beings; valuing the varied experiences that SSE students bring to classrooms; capitalizing on SSE students' self-efficacy and resilience to promote students' literacy; respecting SSE students' literacy skills on out-of-school literacy; paying attention to the personal dimensions of literacy practices to meet the needs of the diverse learners; allowing SSE students to demonstrate their literacies in multiple ways; and collaborating between general education and special education teachers to benefit all students.

The significance of this study resides in that it focuses on the literacy practices of secondary special education students, whose voices have been largely missing in the literature. This understanding of the voice and the lived experiences that secondary special education

students bring to the classroom will help educators, policy makers, and curriculum writers find ways to better serve special education students. In so doing, this study reconceptualizes the power of literacy that needs to be fostered in SSE students, so that they can succeed not only in college and career but also in their personal lives.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

As the summer comes to an end, teachers begin to revise lessons from the previous year. Teachers reflect upon what worked well with their classes, where students struggled and then make revisions to their lessons to ensure more success for the next year's students. Teachers hope that this incoming group of students have stronger skills than the last; that can only helping make the year move smoother. A teacher hopes that each year's students come with the appropriate prerequisite skills to be successful, but more times than not there are still those students who are two and three grade levels behind in their skills. The high stakes testing that attributed to the No Child Left Behind Act has been in a teacher's mind since it was first enacted in 2002. Looming over the heads of teachers are the results of last year's high stakes testing. Ideas are brainstormed and previous results from high stakes testing are used as a starting point for this year's instruction. Once again, teachers know that so much depends on the scores of the high stakes testing. Speculation continued over the summer that the school may have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) because of the special education subgroup the largest subgroup after gender and socioeconomic status in high stakes testing reporting. [1]

The school year starts. Teachers and students are eager to begin another year of learning. Questions linger about the success of the different subgroups on the high stakes testing. One subgroup that continues to worry some teachers is the success of the special education sub group. Tentative scores did not look good after testing. There is the hope that the special education subgroup can meet the mark through either the confidence intervals (a range of values (interval)

---

[1] These ideas have since changed to focus on Quality Performance Accreditation and the Common Core State Standards that have been adopted in 2010 and implemented in 2014 (Common Core Standards Initiatives, 2010)

that act as good estimates of the unknown population parameters) or safe harbor (forgives a school for low test scores from one or more subgroups if those students show yearly improvement and if the school scores well on the whole).

I have now entered the seventeenth year of my teaching career. Throughout my career, I have spent countless hours in academic meetings finding out how to improve test scores and help foster more literate students. The concept and requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) have been with me throughout. In the last five years, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Common Core Standards Initiatives, 2010) have begun to reshape teacher instruction. I understand that for school districts, there is much at stake these days concerning test scores and the changing landscape of high stakes testing. I have noted that what part a student plays in this high-stakes situation is not a compelling point when administrators consider the effects of testing. CCSS are now, too, having an effect on those tested. Particularly, since districts are still deciding on how to assess these new standards. In the classroom, I am constantly focusing on the students. As a special education teacher, I am not only dealing with helping students make the cut academically (high stakes testing scores, ACT scores, day to day class participation and graduation), but I have to also navigate through the students perceptions of themselves as special education students. Many of these students already know and hold the perception that they are not as skilled, academically, as their peers. It is this perception that hinders students from being successful on activities in school. The realization of the special education student's perception of themselves, whether it be positive or negative, is a voice that needs to be heard. If one is able to understand the perceptions that special education students have of themselves as literate beings, one might find better success in instruction. It is a teacher's job to empower students in the realization that they are literate beings regardless of the obstacles that may stand in their way.

Moje (2000), Smith & Wilhelm (2006), Tatum (2005), and Wilhelm (2008) all discuss the importance of the student's involvement in reading instruction. They have documented the success of knowing and speaking with students and the increase in student ability. For the special education student, it is even more important to consider the perceptions these students have of their classroom experiences (Hansen & Boody, 1998). Differences in perceptions could point to aspects of reading instruction which may restrict the ability of special education students to be successful. Freire and Macedo (1987) and Macedo (2006) discuss the power that literacy has to forward one's status in society. Literacy is power. Literacy has the power for a student to transcend their current social and economic status. It is through the understanding of students' perception of themselves as literate beings that a teacher can better help to facilitate learning in content areas.

Unfortunately in current testing environments, there does not seem to be time to talk with the students, special education or not, about their perceptions of themselves. Macedo (2006) explains how "the educational 'tomb,' for those teachers who have blindly accepted the status quo, is embodied in the ditto sheets and workbooks that mark and control the pace of reutilization in the drill-and-practice assembly line" (p. 16). This is similarly seen in the classrooms where too much time is focused on practicing how to take the formative test and filling the holes in students' backgrounds rather than being able to have an honest conversation with students about what makes them who they are, where they came from and how they navigate through the social constructs of school. There is also a shift to expand a students' ability to explain answers, not just check a box. CCSS now require students at all levels to be able to discuss and explain their thinking and responses (Common Core Standard Initiative, 2010). The special education student may also receive additional interventions to help them in

their areas of weakness. These interventions are in addition to a student's daily course load and usually met with friction by both the students and the staff. What do they think of themselves as literate beings? A special education student's voice is a valid voice to hear. The special education student voice is easily absent from the conversation. As a teacher of special education students, I hear those voices. I see special education students not realizing the power that they have to transcend the stigma that education has assigned them.

Literacy in the global world is constantly evolving. No longer are students only expected to use a paper and pencil to communicate but it has become essential for students to navigate the changing technological and digital landscape of literacy today (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). It is important because literacy is the power that helps all students transcend their current status in life. As disenfranchised students recognize they are literate being, doors open in their employment and social lives that would not have been opened before. In this technological age, literacy is not just being able to read and write. The notion of literacy has grown to include the varied methods of communication such as blogging, texting, instant messaging, web page navigation, and creation (NCTE, 2008). The common ideas of literacy have changed with the increased use of technology. Students not only have to be able to read and write but also need to be able to create and comprehend meaning through the use of the variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital, and other forms of communication that were not around twenty years ago. It is challenging for students who have identified disabilities in reading and writing to keep up with the ever-changing definition of literacy. Students in special education today are engaging in these varieties of communication systems but do not realize that they are utilizing these new literacies. Recognizing the power they have to communicate will only increase their abilities to succeed in an age of technological innovation.

Overview of the Issues

This study is to understand the special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings. I aim to find ways in which teachers can take this understanding and apply it to working with students, who receive special education services. More specifically, this study is to understand the phenomenon of the special education students' perception of themselves as literate beings.

Throughout my career as an educator, I have been a cheerleader for students who let their learning difficulties stand in their way and have championed those who have succeeded in spite of what others said they could not do to make sure they are college or career ready. It is from these experiences that I have collected insight from special education students to help shape the dialogue of special education in the future. A score is not the only aspect that defines a student. The data gleaned from high-stakes testing fails to deliver a full understanding of the students who take them. Special education students are often keenly aware of their abilities. It is their voice that is missing from the dialogue concerning the effectiveness of literacy instruction. The issues that these students face are those of curriculum mandates, personal literacy experiences, and students' mobility.

Teaching subject matter that is assessed through high stakes testing has grown in depth and creates more stress on both students and teachers. The special education student is spending more time in the general education classroom with support from a special educator, whose expertise is in accommodations and modifications needed to allow students ample access to content standards.

Even today, while the federal mantra is to have "No Child Left Behind," and the legislative mandate is that *all* children can learn, and are, therefore, entitled to a "free,

appropriate public education," the course of study for students with disabilities is often

governed in practice by a system of presumptive labels that determine what they will be

taught, by whom and in what type of setting. (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson 2006, p. 1)

This gap is continuing to grow between special education students and their non-identified peers in the general education setting.

The special education student's stress level is increased because his/her disabilities may interfere with the learning and with the student being able to actually demonstrate what he or she knows and can do (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). An English teacher has the deliberate task of making connections between the English curricula and the other content areas through text strategies. Other content teachers tend not to expect that there is need to teach reading strategies for their nonfiction content (Heller, 2014). It is the job of the English teachers to draw connections between the English curriculum and the other contents. While an English teacher is teaching about character development, figurative language, and plot, he/she is also looking at persuasive techniques, expository form, and technical writing. The goal is not only instruction in decoding and comprehending the texts that are read, but also developing the ability to speak and write confidently in the students' classes. Slowly, other content areas have begun to focus on the nonfiction aspect of the curriculum and are beginning to instruct on how to navigate through those texts. Unfortunately, many students do not see the connections between the reading and writing that they do in other core contents (e.g., Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies) and the reading and writing that they do in English classes. It is imperative that students see these connections and transfer reading strategies among the classes in order to prove that the students are proficient readers that make students' college and career ready.

This generation of students has been in school for most of the legislation that has been enacted as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (PL- 107-110, 2002) and now the mindset of CCSS (Common Core Standard Initiative, 2010). High-stakes testing was created to make sure that all students receive an adequate education and achieve the standards that are laid out in specific curricula, making sure that no child is "left behind." Participation of students with disabilities in high stakes testing has been controversial (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007), because historically they perform poorly on these assessments. To combat this, these students have had the benefit of multiple intervention programs and supports throughout their schooling. At times, some students have never been separated from these interventions.

The special education student has been a part of standardized testing since he/she was first identified with having a disability. The special education process mandates that every three years a student is reevaluated for his/her disability (Heward, 1996; PL 94-142, 1975). By the time a special education student turns 14, he/she is a part of the IEP process and has a voice in tailoring their education based on their strengths and weaknesses. This contributes toward the student's awareness of his/her abilities, and they are also aware of what is expected of them in school and as he/she transition to either college or the career force. These students have grown up in a community that has focused on proficiency at grade level and not on the abilities of a student. It seems as though the special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings are being overlooked.

Statement of Problem

There is a crisis in adolescent literacy. Millions of middle and high school students lack the reading and writing skills they need to succeed in college, compete in the workforce, or even read a newspaper (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). I saw this daily in the special education students

that I taught. This crisis does not go unnoticed by teachers, administrators, and the legislature. School districts and teachers are actively utilizing resources and man hours to help students make the grade (Jacobs, 2008, National Association of School Board of Education, 2006, National Urban League, 2005). As teachers work hard to facilitate learning in their classrooms, the teachers are constantly aware of the literacy activities that are waiting for their students after high school.

High-stakes testing has grown out of much discussion from prominent educators and politicians. Based on previous federally funded research in the 1980s, "A Nation at Risk" (National Commission on Academic Excellence, 1983) highlighted what was lacking in the United States of America (U.S.A.) education system. This was the beginning of the need to annually measure the students of U.S.A. regardless of the students' gender, ethnic background, special education status, or socioeconomic standing. Where did the United States rank among other developed nations? Federal programs were created (Head Start (in the 1960's); Title I) to help level the playing field of students in U.S.A. schools. The No Child Left Behind Act was created based upon the progress of the first high-stakes tests. Men and women on Capitol Hill have been deciding for decades what needs to happen in United States (U.S.) classrooms. Research exists on the effects of high-stakes testing (Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump 2008; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Horn 2003; Yeh, 2006), high stakes testing and special education students (Fuchs, Seethaler, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 2008; Fletcher, Francis, Boudousquie, Copeland, Young, Kalinowski, & Vaugh, 2006; Ysseldyke, Nelson, Christenson, Johnson, Dennison, Triezenberg, Sharpe, & Hawes, 2004).

Absent from this legislation is the voice of the students themselves. Currently, with many states' adoption of the CCSS, the United States is attempting to shrink the global

competition gap (Alberti, 2013; Bomer & Maloch, 2011; McNulty & Gloecker, 2011 and Ayers, 2012). It is through stratifying essential outcomes across grade levels that the students of the United States may begin to rise to the global expectations, although this action does not look at students' learning differences. Built in to these new standards are ways to differentiate for the diverse learners, but the gap is continuing to widen.

High-stakes testing has created a way for school districts to see where students line up on a continuum of proficiency. A downfall of high-stakes testing is that all school districts are being compared with each other. No two school districts are alike; therefore, one should not compare school districts to school districts. Unfortunately, that is not what happens. Even with the recent changes in states high stakes' testing, it is putting most students at a disadvantage due to current testing requirements (Hubert & Hauser, 1999).

For some students, high-stakes testing helps to strengthen their perceptions of what it means to be a literate being. These students are able to navigate through the verbiage that is used in the varying modes of literacy. They are able to successfully complete the complex tasks that are required of them in the classroom. There are other students for which testing hinders how they see themselves as literate beings: the special education student who takes the general assessment with accommodations. These are the students that are unable to successfully navigate through the testing verbiage because of skill levels, specific learning disabilities, background knowledge, acquisition of language, knowledge of content level vocabulary, identified environmental, or even socioeconomical limitations, regardless of the supports that a school district has in place. This helps to strengthen the problem that special education students do not have a strong perception of themselves as literate beings.

Being a literate member of society is important to the progress of a student's situation in life. Freire and Macedo (1987) and Macedo (2006) explain that literacy is power. Students have to become literate about their histories, experiences, and the culture of their environments as well as understand the codes and cultures that dominate society in order to transcend (Freire & Macedo, 1987) their current status in life. How does one know if a secondary special education student understands what it means to be literate? How do teachers understand what secondary special education students think is literacy? Teachers do not know what these students think unless the secondary special education student is asked. Most students do not share what they think and feel unless they have built a relationship with teachers. Hence the statement of problem that this current study attempts to address is: How do secondary special education students perceive themselves as literate beings?.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the students in order to understand secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings, using phenomenological methods and phenomenological framework. The voice of the secondary special education student is missing from the literature. In doing so, I aim to find ways to improve special education students' literacies that will help them succeed in the 21st century. I use phenomenology as a theoretical framework because school is a large part of a student's lived experience, and teachers are able to gain a small glimpse of the students' lived experiences in the classroom. It is through these phenomena that I will strengthen the understanding of these special education student perceptions. The findings of the study will provide insight into how students experience these schoolings, in order to help to strengthen teaching and instruction in the general education and special education classrooms. Teaching is not a one-sided endeavor.

Understanding the perceptions that secondary special education students have of themselves as literate beings helps teachers to empower students in ways that are both meaningful and relevant to those they teach.

For the purpose of this study, the participants are secondary special education students who have taken English classes with special education supports. The findings of this phenomenological case study make significant contributions to the literature by informing the literacy community of phenomena that is evident among secondary special education students who are in literate environments. The perceptions that are identified can add to the knowledge base of teachers to see similarities among secondary special education students and directed educators to increase in their instructional techniques.

Research Questions

My interest in finding out how special education students perceive themselves as literate beings has developed from my years as a special education teacher. My experience as a middle and high school special education teacher has taught me that students are able to identify the skills in which they are good and those they are weak (Moje, 2000). Understanding more deeply the perceptions of these students has interested me and caused me to want to document these voices through researching this topic. Therefore the central question of this study is: ***How do secondary special education students perceive themselves as literate beings?***

Questions that are embedded in this central question and will be addressed in this study are:

1. How do secondary special education students understand what it means to be literate?

2. What lived experiences do secondary special education students possess that have shaped their perceptions of being literate?

Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study Methodology

In constructing the design of this study, I considered the different environments that students were a part of during the school day. It seemed most logical for me to design a study around the students that I saw on a daily basis. In doing so, I would be able to understand their perspectives and have a glimpse inside an area of their lived experiences while at school. This has also extended to the experiences that the students have had after graduating high school.

A priority of this research study was to explore phenomena within its natural setting, that being secondary special education students from high school and college or the workforce. In this case, the participants were special education students in a high school who were enrolled in English classes as well as their endeavors after graduating high school. I aimed to explore perceptions from these special education students on how they view themselves as literate beings. These multiple perspectives gave a comprehensive picture of these particular special education students in this particular environment.

In order to analyze the experiences of these participants, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) to examine how these participants made sense of their life events in the context of being secondary special education students and their perceptions of being literate beings in a high stakes testing environment. It is through the analysis of their experiences that I was able to identify themes across the participants through their similarities and differences.

The qualitative study began in the summer and fall semesters of 2011 with students who were in my English III cotaught classes and my modified English III classes. Coteaching classes

consist of a general education English teacher to focus on the content and a Special Education teacher to focus on modifying and accommodating the content (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2013). I have interviewed three students to explore their perceptions after the school year was over. Interviews took place after school once permission was granted by parents or guardians, or the student themselves. I have also followed these students after they have graduated high school. I have continued to communicate with them through letters, email dialogues, social media (after graduating from high school) and in person conversations (during and after their senior year) three years after they had graduated high school.

Significance of the Study

Through the review of literature, I ascertained that there is something missing from the dialogue. Missing from the crisis of adolescent literacy and high-stakes testing is the special education student's voice and how they are impacted.

First, although there is research that focuses on each aspect of this study, this study will add an additional voice to the literature: specifically, the voice of the special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings. Second, there is a need to address the literacy of transient populations, in this case the mobile special education student. Third, there is a need to address the special education students' lived experiences beyond high school.

It is through this phenomenological case study that student perceptions will be recorded, their lived experiences told, and a developed analysis be written to add to the literacy community.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited by certain features. First, while phenomenological case studies tend to look deeply into the essence of the phenomena that is identified, this study will look at a

limited number of students in order to identify a phenomena within this group. The original intent was to have five participants: two male and three female. Two of the participants were African American and three were Caucasian. Due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts, only three of the original participants were able to participate through the completion of the study. "IPA studies usually have a small number of participants and the aim is to reveal something of the experience of each of those individuals. As part of this, the study may explore in detail the similarities and differences between each case" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). The time constraints may give the researcher only a small glimpse into the special education students' perceptions of themselves. Also, due to the limited time and the lapse of time that did occur, it did take these students longer to open up to the researcher and the amount of lived experiences shared was limited. If time was not a hindrance, a longitudinal study might give a better-rounded picture of the students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings if they could be followed throughout high school.

Secondly, my position as an insider might hinder me from providing insights that are free from researcher's bias and subjectivity. I am already an insider within the school as a special education teacher in a high-stakes testing classroom. The relationships that I have formed with these students may hinder the openness another researcher might collect, since students may not want to disappoint their teacher. This may also prove difficult with bracketing their experiences. While I hope that these relationships will help special education students feel comfortable sharing their perceptions of themselves, I recognize that this also may limit the varied responses that I hope to gain.

Researcher's Positionality (Subjectivity)

I rely heavily on my ability to take myself out of the equation and rely on my students' honesty in answering the questions asked of them. To overcome this limitation, Wanda Pillow (2003) discusses reflexivity that is used in qualitative research to legitimize, validate and question that reach practices and representations. Within her paper "Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the use of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research (2003)", she identifies four trends in reflexivity in qualitative research. The trend that to come out of the use of reflexivity that this researcher identifies with is that of the attention to the researcher:

> subjectivity in the research process- a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect the data collection and analysis-that is acceptance and acknowledgment that "how knowledge is acquired, organized and interpreted is relevant to what the claims are. (Pillow, 2003, p.176)

Reflexivity involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process—what sorts of factors influence the researcher's construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It is through this use that I have incorporated my *currere* (see Chapter 3, p. 79) in order to identify where I have come from in order to help remove myself from my participants' stories. There is the need for me to take a critical look at my own role in this research process. By doing this I aim to improve the quality and validity of the research as well as understand and recognize the limitations that may be produced. This is a process that I continue to encounter as I read and reread the stories that the participants have told.

Definition of Terms

Currere: One form of curriculum research that is phenomenologically related to the

autobiographical curriculum theory (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubum, 2008). "Currere focuses on the educational experiences of an individual as reported by the individual." (Pinare, et. al,, 2008, p. 414)

Functional reading: The ability to meet the reading and writing demands, independently, that are required of adults to function in society. (Hillerich, 1976)

Literacy: A lifelong and social continuum of skills characterized by one's ability to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms (NCTE, 2008).

Literate Being: A person who understands what literacy is and is able to demonstrate literacy through different modes of communication and use literacy to navigate through his or her life world (NCTE, 2008).

Mobility: Student movement between states, school districts or classrooms (Swanson & Schneider, 1999).

Perceptions: Windows to one's consciousness (Merleu-Ponty, 1945/2009, p. 62). The thoughtful reflection upon these perceptions are what help to describe the lived experiences of one person. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2009)

Phenomenology: The study of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990).

Reading: The complex cognitive process that decodes symbols and makes meaning from those symbols (comprehension). The mastery of this process is automatic (Smith, 2004).

Reflexivity: Subjectivity in the research process- a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect the data collection and

analysis-that is acceptance and acknowledgment that "how knowledge is acquired, organized and interpreted is relevant to what the claims are (Pillow, 2003, p.176).

Special Education Students: Students whose learning abilities differ from the norm (either above or below) to such an extent that an individualized program of special education is required to meet their needs (Heward, 1996).

CHAPTER 2 - Review of the Literature

Introduction

As the school year begins, a teacher is ready to shape the young minds of the future. Both students and the teachers are recharged and excited to start the school year. Unfortunately, what hangs in the air during in-service meetings and pre-school activities are the whispers: "Have we or haven't we made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress)?" Special education teachers know this whisper all too well. They know that it may be those students receiving services that may not have made AYP. If the school has made AYP, the underlying tone of the administration is one that urges the faculty to keep up the high success rate towards the rising bar of proficiency. If the school has not made AYP, the tone is that of disappointment and possibly finger pointing. The hope is that this year's students will be able to reach the rising bar of proficiency. Ironically, some school districts no longer use the term AYP. Schools now use a new model, the 21st Century themes of Relationships, Relevance, Responsive Culture, Results and Rigor (Five R's) as a way to focus on the quality characteristics of a school system. This was adopted in by the state of Kansas in 2011 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2014). Teachers may hold on to the ideas of AYP as a scar from No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

As a teacher who worked in a secondary school that has reached AYP in reading on and off in the last few years, I have found it is imperative that teachers continue to improve their skills and deliberately deliver instruction to help facilitate the success of the tested students. This is not just the deliberate improvement of the regular education curriculum but more importantly the special education services and curriculum. The bar of proficiency is continuing to rise for all students without the understanding that the challenges that some students have will prevent them from ever reaching that bar.

More and more, special education students are being placed in the regular education classroom so that they are receiving the content instruction from a highly qualified teacher. Modifications and accommodations to instruction are provided by a special education teacher in a co-taught class or in a modified class for those students who need more specialized instruction (Villa, Thousands, & Nevin, 2013). Secondary special education students, who are placed in co-taught classrooms, need to be able to meet the demands in the general education classrooms as well as maintaining their motivation on challenging assignments.

Guthrie (2000) addresses the correlation between student engagement and motivation with reading achievement. He also addresses the decline in the interest and competence beliefs of students in middle and high school for the English language arts. These changes of motivation are reflective of changes in classroom conditions.

> Children in these classes move from a self-contained, responsive classroom that honored students' voices and where formal grades were not awarded, to a teacher centered environment in which students had fewer opportunities for self-expression and little opportunity for negotiating with teachers about their learning. (Guthrie, 2000, p.3)

Questions that need to be asked of both the special education teacher and the general education teacher are: How does an educator maintain consistency in their instruction when the population and ability of students of the class changes? How do special education students who know that they struggle, fight the temptation to slack off and persevere when the curriculum demands success? How do special education students who have changed school every two to three years figure out the culture of yet another school and yet another system of curriculum?

The recent adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has been added to teachers' and students' realities today. Teachers have the double duty to instruct students in

reading and writing skills as well as how to reach the rigor and expectations of the CCSS. This seems to be a double-edged sword. Instead of the organic movement between skills and ideas, teachers must be constantly mindful of the time they have to instruct, while simultaneously helping their students rise to the intent of CCSS.

The Common Core asks students to read stories and literature, as well as more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social studies. Students will be challenged and asked questions that push them to refer back to what they've read. This stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life. The standards establish guidelines for English language arts (ELA) as well as for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Because students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, the standards promote the literacy skills and concepts required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines. (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2010, http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/)

Gone are the times of enjoying the literature and understanding the nuances of the author's craft, which is replaced by the rigor of citing strong and textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Teachers are charged with making sure that students are able to speak and write intelligently amongst varying pieces of text. Special education students who lack mastery of these concepts are pulled out of classes to receive specialized instruction to help them perform better on the high stakes tests.

There seems to be a disconnect between the concepts taught because of the high-stakes testing and the concepts taught in the student's English class. Some teachers have discussed that

these concepts contained in high-stakes testing do not require much focus on reading but rather on thinking. Special education students have the most trouble with these concepts because of the identified challenges they possess in learning. In a culture that now seems immediate and high-energy because of technological innovation, there is a need for students to focus on a task in school for more than just a few minutes. For some special education students this is extremely difficult and, even with the accommodations that are provided, attention to a specific task is almost unattainable.

The outcome of these tests is "used to help with student promotion and retention, student placement in reading groups, school funding decisions, labeling of schools as successful or failing and the degree of community support" (Afflerbach, 2009, p. 151). For the special education student, the outcome of these tests continues to identify the skills and concepts that they are lacking, therefore continuing to deflate their self concepts (Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006). Unfortunately, high-stakes tests in reading fail to discuss the perceptions of the students that they assess. The student is a valid voice that puts a person behind the assessment score. Special education students in today's secondary classrooms have had the unfortunate distinction to be assessed with high-stakes testing since they entered school on top of the regular testing to document their disability. With a population of special education students who have had many experiences with testing, their perceptions of their abilities in reading, enrollment in schools, and their perceptions of the value of the high-stakes tests in reading is one that is missing from the literature. This means as a researcher, it is one's responsibility to help ensure that special education students value these tests and have the skills to be able to perform accurately and consistently in the many testing environments of which they are a part. This focus tends to move the teachers away from enriching a student's literacy skills and focusing

solely on skills that will help him/her achieve proficiency on the high-stakes tests and not on the need to be life-long learners in the changing literacy mediums.

Literacy once was simply a person's ability to read and write. This ability has evolved over the years based upon the shifts within society and technology. In the 21st century, literacy is a lifelong and social continuum of skills characterized by one's ability to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written digital and other forms (Beers, 2007; Macedo, 2006; Smith, 2004). In today's society that ability is paramount to one's movement within the social structure, "to be liberated is not to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 11). Macedo views literacy as a language of possibility, enabling a learner to recognize and understand their voices within a multitude of discourses they must deal with (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This ability seems to be stifled when the focus is on test scores and not transforming students into literate beings.

The intention of the CCSS is to prepare United States students to succeed. The development of these standards were out of an initiative in 2009 by state leaders (Common Core Standard Initiative, 2010). These state leaders, as well as school officials, saw the need for consistent real world learning goals that allowed students wherever they lived to be prepared to graduate high school and be prepared for career, college and life. The CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy build on current standards that states have but allow for a shift to happen to enable students to more successful in career, college and life.

In addition to exemplar texts in literature, the CCSS places attention on genre-specific as well as discipline-specific reading and writing (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). The focus on informational text is not only so students have an appreciation of and the ability to interact with

varying text structures but it is to ensure that students build knowledge and are prepared to read and write across disciplines. "The CCSS includes a set of standards for literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects" (Giles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013, p. 34). It is with the inclusion of the disciplines in addition to English language arts and math, it allows for literacy skills to be taught using discipline-specific literature. By spreading the instruction of literacy across disciplines allows for all teachers to view themselves as teachers of literacy and not just the English teacher.

Students bring with them varying life experiences that can help to shape their comprehension of the texts they interact with. The lived experiences that students have outside of school and the knowledge that students gain through school are important in their rights and constitute meaningful supports for their literacy development. It is through this literacy development amongst the CCSS that help to increase a student's ability to navigate through varying contexts and disciplines in order to become success in their career, college and in their lives.

To help address these concerns, the following is divided into the four sections: (a) the theoretical framework of phenomenology; (b) reading and literacy in a secondary setting; (c) students' perceptions on reading and literacy, and (d) issues in educating the transient population.

Theoretical Framework: Phenomenology

In order to understand fully a special education student's perception of himself or herself as a literate being, one must understand the student's experiences in that environment. van Manen (1982) addresses this with "Phenomenology asks the simple questions, 'What is it like to have a certain experience?" (p. 295). Teachers can reflect on their own experiences in a similar setting, but to have an accurate view of students today, they must ask the questions concerning the students' experiences that shape their perceptions of themselves in the high-stakes testing environment. "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (van Manen, 1990, p. 62). It is through these experiences that teachers are able to understand the students better.

What is Phenomenology?

"Phenomenology is a disciplined, rigorous effect to understand profoundly and authentically" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubmann, 2008, p. 405), and using phenomenology as the theory behind this study, the investigator questions how the phenomena present themselves in the lived experiences of the individual (Pinar et al., 2008). Pedagogical theorizing in a deep sense is the attempt to achieve phenomenological understanding, which goes beyond language and discourse (van Manen, 1982). Through the reflection of the phenomena that are identified, one may truly understand the experiences that a student may have in specific environments.

Unfortunately, some in the research community argue that phenomenology has no practical knowledge because "you cannot do anything with phenomenological knowledge' (van Manen 1982, p. 297). Phenomenology has no way to quantify the findings, thus, worrying the research community. In reality though, teachers and students are constantly using the lived

experiences of themselves and their students to reflect upon and grow both as teachers and learners. These experiences have meaning and should not be cast aside.

Max van Manen outlines what phenomenology is in his 1990 book, *Researching the Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Phenomenology is the study of the lived experience. It aims to gather a deeper understanding or meaning of a person's everyday life. It is used to gather the consciousness of the subject. This consciousness is what links a person to the object or the world. It is then "the phenomenologist's main task to reveal the mystery of the world and of human experience with attention, wonder, awareness, and intentions to seize the meanings of the world and to let the meanings come into being" (Kim, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, there is a keen interest from teachers and instructors in phenomenology and in the significant world of the subject. The subject in the classroom setting is the student.

There is also the need in phenomenology to study the essence ("the here not the end, but a means, that our effective involvement in the world is precisely what has to be understood" (Merleau-Ponty,1945/2009 p. xvi)) of the experience, demonstrated through a teachers need to be able to read and react to their students. By being aware of the "world" of the students, the teacher will help strengthen the scope of instruction. It is not the "how" but the "what." These lived experiences have meaning, whether explicitly or implicitly, to one's existence.

Like other social sciences and hard sciences, phenomenlogy is a scientific study. This is a system of a philosophy that puts the essences back into existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2009) and the science of phenomena (Heidegger, 1962). Phenomenology is also self-critical, where teachers/instructors/researchers are examining continually its methods in an attempt to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Phenomenological research is a practice of thoughtfulness. The interest in phenomenological research materializes from the concerns that

parents, teachers, psychologists, and other experts develop as they observe and interact with the everyday lives and experiences of students. This is the poetic activity that searches for the essence of what it means to be human. Phenomenology is indeed what the most effective teachers 'do' instinctively: present material, observe, draw conclusions, reflect, adjust, modify, assess and begin all over again. It occurs constanly and is so fluid it is almost impossible to 'catch' as an isolated event.

Phenomenology had its beginnings in the early 20th century with the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidgger, and Merleau-Ponty. Husserl is the first modern philosopher that outlines a philosophy that moved from logic to one of language and experiences (Smith, 2008). It began as a study of consciouness of experiences that one had. By looking at one's experiences there is a way to reflect among the world around us. This led to post-Husserlian phenomonenological research that is not concrete ideas but rather meaning situationally understood and communicated. Reality is no longer away from one's grasp. It can be communicated and negotiated (Pinar et. al, 2008).

Heidegger, in the 1920s "conceived of difficulties or problems as occasions for becoming aware of the boundaries or horizons of the natural attitude" (Pinar et. al, 2008, p. 406). It is the understated idea of what it means to be alive. "The phenomenologist rejects both rationalism and empiricism because they fail to account for the world as experienced by human beings" (Pinar et. al., 2008, p. 405). A human's understanding will then occur in an actual lived situation as it is questioned to exist.   The individual needs to be shocked into the awareness of their perceptions, into a recognition that one has constitute one's own life world (Pinar et. al, 2008).

26

In the 1940s, Merleau-Ponty wrote *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2009) in which he emphasized the role of the body in the human experience. Merleau-Ponty focused on the body image, our experiences of our own bodies, and its significance in our activities for him. It was through this focus that one is a part of experiences in both body and mind.

These forefathers of phenomenology, along with others, helped to create a movement that is continuing today. Phenomenology has been institutionalized at the University of Alberta. Here both Ted Aoki and Max van Manen have taught and researched the concept in the last 30 years. Most recently van Manen has been a part of the Department of Secondary Education as the University of Alberta. They, along with Maxine Greene, Madeleine Grumet and William Pinar, have brought phenomonology into the forefront of educational research.

van Manen (1986) speaks of phenomonology in the form of the lived experiences regardless of the environment of the subject. Phenomenology hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meanings of our everyday experiences. This differs from most other sciences in that the insight gained on the way someone experiences events is attained without catagorizing, classifying, or abstracting the events. Phenomenolgy does not offer effective theories, but it gives plausible insights to help to describe discovered phenomena within one's experiences. Like Husserl, Hiedegger, and Merleau-Ponty, van Manen (1990) discusses that conscisousness is the only access human beings have in the world. In order to truly relate to the world around, there is the need to be conscious to one's world.

The essence of a phenomenon is a universal, which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). This is important when looking at educational research, because one is able to gain a better understaning of the learning that may occur when the nature

of the experience is more descriptive. These descriptions enable one to gather a fuller and deeper understanding of the essence of experiences.

This richness is documented in ways that are not traditional to research. Since the aim is not to define a particular meaning in one's culture, social group, historial period, mental status, or individual life, a phenomenologist attempts to gain meaning through the world that one exists in (van Manen, 1990) i.e., the lifeworld of our everyday existence. While much research tries to solve problems, the use of phenomenology does not. The hallmark of phenomenology is that it asks for the meaning and significance of specific phenomena that have been identified in the lived experiences of people.

Moustaka (1994) speaks of the lived experiences within the curriculum. Moustakas's (1994) transcendental or pyschological phenomonology is focused less on the interpetations of the researcher and more on the descriptive experiences of the participants. Students are the subjects of these lived experiences of the enacted curriculum. The phenomenological investigator (or teacher) questions how phenomena – the things themselves – present themselves in the lived experiences of the individual, especially as they present them in lived times (Pinar, et. al 2008). It is the teacher's responsibility through his/her own action research to set aside the ordinary, common-sense assumptions about the surface-level experiences in order to make explicit deep-level interpertation beneath the surface of the experiences (Willis & Allen, 1978). The main reason that a researcher may adopt a phenomenological perspective is in order to help them to bring to light that which presents itself as pedagogy in our lives with children (van Manen, 1990). It is this light or pedagogy that helps teachers continually to self-reflect on their daily occupational question: what is it like to be an educator or teacher? This question continues

to bring one back to the world of one's experiences. It is these experiences that help to extend

one's understanding of situations in regards to the students.

Phenomenology of Perception

In phenomenology, perception is defined as the primary source of knowledge, the source

that cannot be doubted (Moustakas, 1994). With every perception, one is able to enhance the

experiences of the phenomena**.** It is this process of fresh perceptions that brings to the

consciousness knowledge that deepens the meanings of the lived expereinces.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2009) found that in the study of perception, one finds the language

of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious. It is throughout those sensations that each

part has meaning. "The structure of actual perceptions alone can teach us what perception is.

The pure impression is therefore not only undiscoverable, but also imperceptible and so

inconceivable as an instant of perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2009, p. 4). It is through the

analysis of these perceptions that one discovers meaning with each quality that is uncovered.

"A being capable of sense-experience (sentir) – in the sense of coinciding absolutely with and

impression or a quality – could have no other way of knowing" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2009, p.

15). By understanding what is heard, seen or sensed, those qualities are what enhances one's

experiences that in turn shape the perception. Perceptions open windows to things that one may

not see because they are moving too fast. The perceptions are windows to one's consciousness.

The thoughtful reflection upon these perceptions are what help to describe the lived experiences

of one person. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2009) addresses this idea in that:

the return to the 'immediate data of consciousness' became therefore a hopeless

enterprise since the philosophical scrutiny was try to *be* what it could not, in principle,

see. The difficulty was not only to destroy the prejudice of the exterior, as all

philosophies urge the beginner to do, or to describe the mind in language made for representing things. It was much more fundamental, since interiority defined by impressions, by its nature evaded every attempt to express it. It was not only the imparting of philosophical intuitions to others which became difficult – or reduced itself to a sort of incantation designed to induce in them experiences comparable to the philosopher's – but the philosopher himself could not be clearly aware of *what* he saw in the instant, since he would have had to think it, that is, fix it and distort it. (p. 66)

In order to "see" the world, one must be open to the things that are around them. It is through the world around them that a person is open to the experiences and, in turn, has particular perceptions about what has happened around them; this "theory of the body is already a theory of perception"(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2009, p. 235). "External perceptions and the perceptions of one's own body vary in conjuction because they are the two facets of one in the same act" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2009 , p. 237). The idea that even if it appears that a person is'going through the motions' exhibits that what is happening around a person is as important as the person consciously participating in the experiences. van Manen speaks of the notion that the "perceptiveness needed, the understanding and insight required, the feeling for the right action are not necessarily separate stages in a sequential process" (1991, p. 146). Perceptions feed the lived experience. It is these preceptions that one must understand not only on the surface level but deeper to gain the true essence of the phenomenon. It is through attending to our deep level of experiences of the world and to the experiences of others, we can learn something about both the nature and the structure of the world and the nature and structure of the experience (Willis & Allen, 1978).

van Manen states that "atmosphere is a way of knowing" (van Manen, 1986, p. 31) to help create the atmosphere for the phenomenon. The atmosphere of a place can help to influence perceptions of one's lived experiences. In a school setting, the mood of a place also depends on the disposition or frame of mind the teacher brings to it. Teachers intuitively know that the power of atmosphere can contribute to the general sense of being and to the positive well-being of a student. School is a place that fosters experiences that a researcher can gain from this smaller microcosm of the world. "Atmosphere is the way in which space is lived and experienced. But atmosphere is also the way a teacher is present to children and the way children are present to themselves and the teacher" (van Manen, 1986, p. 36). The atmosphere of a loud classroom can tell about the student's lived experience, just as much as a silent classroom does.

Not only does atmosphere influence the perceptions in phenomenology but also the intentions of a person, united with sensations, that make up the full concrete act of perception. This way the object achieves full-bodied presence (Moustakas, 1994). Not only does the subject experience the perceived thing in a one-sided process, but one also is interacting and experiencing the thing as a whole object. Not one or even multiple perceptions exhaust the possibilities of knowing and experiencing. New perceptions hold the possibility of increased knowledge in regards to the whole object.

A problem with the reliability of human perception can be seen in the way that a phenomenologist can take only what people say and think seriously (Levering, 2006). One must not read into situations with their own perceptions in order to maintain the essences of the subjects' perceptions. Phenomenological research is expressively the interest in people's experiences and in the experiences of those usually ignored. The idea of objectivity tends to

disappear because the experiences that people have are to be true and are true. There is more intersubjectivity than objectivity when the researcher analyzes the experiences of the subjects in regards to a specific phenomenon. There is the need for matter-of-fact accounts rather than extraneous stories. The reality of one's perception is a product of its time and culture, and what is relevant to that person.

Special Education Students' Perceptions

Isolating special education students' perceptions of themselves is an important perspective to discuss. "Historically, education goals have tended to fluctuate from emphais solely on cognitive outcomes to major concerns with social and affective ones" (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976, p. 407) This is especially seen in the special education populations in schools. Schools are a social environment that are defined by the perceptions of the members of that envirnoment (Trickett, Leone, Fink, & Braaten, 1993). Special education students many times are not considered members of classrooms because of their differences. The special education students' differences may be accommondations and modifications that may be made to enable them to access the general education curriculum.

Studies have indicated that students with learning disabilities may develop additional self-perception problems like low self- efficacy beliefs, and academic interventions may be more effective when incorporated with counseling and social behavioral interventions (Hampton & Mason, 2003). With the addition of high stakes testing, there are only so many hours in a day for teachers to incorporate instruction on self-concept, therefore lessening the postive perceptions that special education students may have of themselves.

Special education students are also a group that has experienced academic failure and that in itself can limit their perceptions of their abilites to see academic growth. Since students' self-

concepts are seen as influencing their achievement outcomes, motivation is also affected (Chapman, 1988; Meltzer, Reddy, Pollica, Roditi, Sayer, & Theokas, 2004). Students who feel worthless and ineffectual tend to reduce their effort or give up when work is difficult (Chapman, 1988). This is especially seen when special education students are faced with high stakes testing and the accommodations are not effective in leveling the playing field. Insight into special education students' perceptions of being literate in a high stakes testing environment can add to the literature base and help teachers to instruct these students more effectively.

This knowledge of the phenomenology of perception and special education students' perceptions is important to this study. It allows me to bring special education students' perceptions to the forefront of the research, which otherwise would go unnoticed. It is through the special education students' own perceptions that I reflect on the experiences that they have in the high-stakes testing enviroment. The study is reflective of the special education students' perceptions of themselves and not of my perceptions of them.

Reading and Literacy in a Secondary School Setting

Reading and literacy tend to be individual activities within the classroom regardless of the instruction that is being implementated. Students bring with them their perceptions of themselves as literate beings in every classroom they enter. It is the job of the teacher to navigate through the different lived experiences of the students and facilitate reading and literacy instruction.

Therefore, reading is in the forefront of what every single teacher does in their classroom regardless of the discipline they teach. At the secondary level, new challenges emerge. Students in elementary school have been taught how to read. Special education students have been pulled out of classrooms to receive specialized instruction in reading in resource rooms. The focus in

these rooms is on their challenges and providing specific instruction those areas. Elementary

students have traveled through guided reading, directed reading activities, scaffolding reading

experiences, holistic, whole-language, learner-centered, and literature-based approaches (Smith,

2004; Tierney & Readence, 2000) in order to attain the skills to decode and comprehend what

they are reading. The focus here is on how to read. Comprehension does play a part in

elementary reading, but the process of decoding is the initial focus and, as the grades progress,

only then does comprehension move to the forefront of instruction. This initial shift is often

attributed to third grade when the shift is identified as moving from how to read to read to learn.

At the secondary level, the teacher's focus has shifted. Teachers are navigating with

students through a multitude of different literacies (oral, written, digital and other forms), in

order to learn content-specific information. Special education students are regularly involved in

the general education curriculum at the secondary level. These students need not only to

navigate through the different literacies but also compensate for their disabilities. Special

education teachers are helping students to compensate through accommodations and

modifications to the general education curriculum. These requirements of literacy can be seen in

a definition of adolescent literacy defined by John Guthrie and Jamie Metsala (1999):

> A highly achieving student, whether at grade four, eight, or twelve, must not only
>
> comprehend passages of text but must also 1) integrate information across multiple texts,
>
> 2) critically relate paragraph meaning to personal experience, 3) employ knowledge from
>
> text to evaluate science observations or historical documents, and 4) compose complete
>
> messages in the form of stories and reports to an actual audiences. (p. 382)

Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) also have collected information that defines proficient

adolescent literacy skills as "the ability to read, interpret, critique, and produce the discourse of a

disciplinary area" (p. 111). Regardless of what the student is reading (math, science, art, social studies), they must be able to synthesize and connect with the information they have read. This shift in types of reading is one where adolescents need the ability to access the conventions of disciplinary knowledge in the production of a desired outcome, and they need the ability to communicate the meaning or message of the reading material. This knowledge gives adolescents the power to read critically across various texts and disciplines, thus enabling adolescents to become critical readers and thinkers (Moje et. al, 2008). It is imperative that students are able to read and think critically. Continually, identifying strategies and processes in order to read materials in the different disciplines can only help to create more aware readers in the 21st century.

In an article by Moje, Dillion, and O'Brien (2000), they argue that reading (and all literacy acts) is the result of an intersection of the learners' knowledge and interest, textual factors, and social, cultural, and disciplinary contexts. The ability for students to connect with the literacy in the classroom is paramount to the success of the reading. Hooking into student interests and cultural backgrounds has proved successful in classrooms. There is an immediate buy-in to the literacy or the curriculum when student interest is easily seen by outsiders.

Literacy is not just linked to the school day. Literacy is intertwined with the demands of the workforce and 21st Century Literacies. Technology is engaging the adolescent student more consistently than the traditional classroom (Kajder, 2007). With these increased demands on adolescent students, there is a growing need for more sophisticated literacy development, and not just for the lowest achieving students (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students are required to read charts, graphs, technical handbooks, computer programs, math equations and literary pieces on a daily basis in school. These requirements cause educators to be more deliberate in their

instruction of reading those materials. At times, teachers neglect to instruct on the appropriate

skills to read those materials because they assume a student's consistent engagement with

technology, regardless of the student's abilities, makes him/her proficient in reading those types

of documents. Teachers need to dismiss their false notion that subordinate students 'can't learn'

or 'don't know how to learn'. Special education students are masters at this facade. Teachers

also need to understand the social and cultural fabric that informs, shapes, and reproduces the

despair of poverty, fatalism, and hopelessness captured in the dialogue among these students"

(Macedo, 2006, p. 151). It is part of an educator's job to look to the future and instruct on

behaviors that will make students more critical readers and thinkers with technology that has not

been created yet. Students may be overwhelmed in manipulating those new technologies, as well

as teachers.

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), through a Carnegie-funded research project, identified

those specific literacy skills that are needed in a high school setting. The model for literacy

progression starts with generalized basic literacy skills, if not all reading tasks in this first stage**.**

These skills include basic decoding skills, understanding of various print and literacy

conventions (e.g., understanding that text must be meaningful, the primacy of print versus

illustrations, directionality, concept of word), recognition of high frequency words and

some basic fluency routines (e.g., responding appropriately to basic punctuation).

(Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, pp.43-44)

The majority of these first-stage skills are mastered in the elementary grades, though those who

have struggled with reading may acquire them through middle school and demonstrate mastery

by entry to high school (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Smith, 2004). It is in this environment that

a student is receiving the most direct instruction and support (Alvermann, 2009; Blanton &

Blanton, 1994; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995).

The second stage of literacy instruction that Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) identify is

intermediate literacy. Intermediate literacy is literacy that is attained by the end of middle school.

It is common to find high school students who still struggle to read texts because they have not

mastered the tools in intermediate literacy. Many special education students, stay in the

intermediate stage throughout high school. Intermediate literacy is defined through the literacy

skills common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies (not applicable to a

wide variety of texts or disciplines), common word meanings (to know the meanings of a large

number of vocabulary terms (including words not common in oral language and again not

applicable to a wide variety of highly specialized vocabulary or technical terminology of the

disciplines), and basic fluency (the ability to decode multisyllabic words quickly and easily, and

the ability to respond automatically to words that do not appear with high frequency in texts).

Students in this level of literacy also have developed "a cognitive endurance to maintain

attention to more extended discourse, to monitor their own comprehension, and to use various

fix-up procedures if comprehension is not occurring" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 44).

Fortunately, with the annual occurrence of high-stakes testing (Yeh, 2006), high school students

who are lacking in such areas are easily identified. Students who are then identified as having a

"hole" in their reading skills are placed in remedial or support environments to "catch them up."

Special education students are constantly placed in additional support programs to combat the

challenges in reading skills. Unfortunately, because of identified weaknesses at the secondary

level, students are pulled from other classes that interests them in order to further develop those

skills that they are lacking. This seems counterproductive since students are removed from other types of literacies when placed in a pure reading remediation program.

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) identify those skills that should be acquired by the end of high school. The discipline specific literacy includes skills that are specialized to history, science, mathematics, literature or other subject matter. It is at the secondary level where students are decoding and comprehending specialized texts. Adolescents must change between the specialized materials throughout the school day, shifting between a history book, a science book, a literature and maybe even a manual in an application class. This requires high-level skills that are taught rarely in isolation and which are rarely attained by some special education students. "The high-level skills and abilities are embedded in these disciplinary or technical uses of literacy are probably not particularly easy to learn, since they are not likely to have many parallels in oral language use, and they have to be applied to difficult text" (Shanahan & Shanahan , 2008, p. 45). Students are challenged in their classes and literacy instruction almost disappears, or is simply reiterated as general reading strategies focused on the lowest functioning students (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon 1990; Marzano, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Smith, 2004).

In order to combat the downfall of specific literacy instruction, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) explains that some older struggling readers need specific interventions with explicit and systematic decoding instruction, while others need comprehensive instruction to include building vocabulary and background knowledge. The Alliance for Excellent Education also identifies in a September 2010 *Policy Brief* that without consistent content-area literacy support, many students continue to lose ground because of limited background knowledge and a lack of reading strategies to comprehend concepts introduced in textbooks. In doing content

specific literacy instruction, students would receive intervention depending on their needs. This idea is emerging in classrooms across the country with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that emphasizes the need for literacy instruction to be not only on the shoulders of the English/Reading teachers but all teachers in the secondary schools. In addition to the CCSS, the multiple-tiered system of support (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Kansas MTSS – KSDE, 2009) would allow teachers to implement appropriate literacy instruction to specifically identified students.

Macedo (2006) describes that he, too, has tried to demonstrate that both the competency-based skills-banking approach to literacy and the highest level literacy acquisition from specialization fails to provide the readers with the necessary intellectual tools to uncover reality that often is hidden through the language of power. An intervention for intervention's sake does not help to lessen the gaps between students in the classrooms.

Students as Literate Beings

Students, whether they realize it or not, are literate beings. The evolution of technology has changed what it means to be literate in the classroom. A student is no longer only required to read and comprehend the written word or write on paper, but he/she is expected to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms of communication (NCTE, 2008).

Literacy in the secondary school, therefore, takes on a very different look than literacy in an elementary school. A student must navigate between different academic cultures and the different types of literacies that go with a particular subject. Moje (2000) identifies the classroom cultures of a secondary school through the "definition of teachers' and students' (a) beliefs about the nature of knowledge; (b) philosophies and knowledge about the discipline,

teaching and learning in that discipline, and teaching and learning in general; (c) past school experiences; (d) home and community experiences; and (e) feelings and emotions about school and about themselves in general" (p. 23). This classroom culture that the teacher is aware of, but may not outwardly acknowledge to the members of the class. By understanding the culture of the classroom, a teacher is able to draw on the past experiences of the students to make connections that can aid in the facilitating knowledge in class. It is through these interactions that shape the teaching and learning of the teachers and students. It is also through these interactions that teachers see the perceptions that students have of themselves as readers.

Secondary teachers tend to be content experts and forget that their content or their approach to content may spill over into other content. Secondary schooling tends to focus on time, control, and content. Students' early memories of navigating between texts come from the elementary teachers who tend to be a "jack-of-all-trades" when it comes to different content and are able to guide students from one text to another. In secondary school environments, it is the students' responsibility to successfully navigate from English, to math, to science, to history and be able to adapt to the literacy of each classroom. Transitioning between content readings may be difficult when "young people have been shut out of academic, social, and community opportunities because they could not successfully perform the academic tasks deemed valuable in school" (Moje, 2000, p. 15).

Students' past school experience will shape their perception of themselves as readers. Wilhelm (2008) writes about the existing chasm between home reading and school reading, both engaged and unengaged experiences of reading that shape the perceptions of students in and outside of the classroom. Students understand that reading in school is not for the enjoyment of reading but to find the right answer, and this has soured some students' desire to read in school.

This idea of finding the right answer is one that schools and textbooks endorse and this disenfranchises the readers (Wilhelm, 2008). Textbooks do not empower the student to think while reading, but to just find the right answers. Students also will find a way to secretly read and appear to be disengaged in classroom reading.

This, in turn, may force the teachers to conference with parents, specialists, and other educators to find out why the student is not being successful in the classroom. It is not necessarily that the student is unable to read or make meaning, but that the content presented in the classroom does not keep their interest. For those students who are not engaged, "ways must be provided to include and value their voices, to make them a part of the meaning-making community" (Wilhelm, 2008, p. 198).

A student's past school experiences continue to help shape his/her reading identity. Alvermann's (2001) article identifies three ideas that create a students' reading identity. Many times students' identities as readers are decided for them and without taking into account the student**.** The culture of a classroom helps to shape a students' reading identity. Culture is thought to include the routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that people produce, make meaning of, and share as they work communally as a group. "Adolescent contacts with adult family members and with adults in the community institutions such as schools, libraries, youth organizations and churches contribute to the shaping of both worlds" (Alvermann, 2001, p. 678). These aspects of culture are a part of the classroom in addition to the student outside life.

Students' Perceptions' of Literacy

Not only does a student's contact with his/her surroundings enhance his/her perception of himself/herself in school but also those self-beliefs that play in motivating individuals (Pajares, 1996). Like Bandura (1993), Pajares explores the perceived self-efficacy and beliefs in

academic settings. These ideas greatly shape a student's academic perception of himself/herself in the classroom. It has been reported that self-efficacy beliefs are correlated with other self-beliefs, motivation constructs, academic choices, changes, and achievement within students, although research has seen that the effect, size, and relationships depend on the manner in which self-efficacy and criteria tasks are operationalized and assessed (Pajares, 1996). These self-beliefs of efficacy play a key role in self-regulation of motivation. Students form beliefs about what they can do. They set goals or set a lack of goals and plan a course of action to achieve those goals (Bandura, 1993). Alvermann (2002) asserts that how an adolescent perceives himself/herself as a reader and a writer will affect how motivated he/she is to learn in their subject-area classes. Teachers' perceptions of students' motivation to learn also influence how hard the teachers are willing to work to instill in the students a sense of competence and self-worth. Attending to the issues of self-efficacy are a start in the right direction to improve literacy instruction for adolescent students. Moje (2000), Wilhelm (2008), and Smith and Wilhelm (2002), explored adolescents' perception of reading. They used a cross-sectional sample of students in order to form generalizations about both able readers and readers who are lacking skills in order to help teachers gain insight into the students that may be sitting in their classes.

One dimension of education a teacher must be aware of is both a student's perception of reading and how those perceptions impact his/her learning. This is not just a one-way process in documenting the lived experiences of the students in the reading process but also documenting the reflective analysis of the learning and teaching experiences of the teacher (Risko, Roskos & Vukelich, 2002).

A teacher may gather a student's perceptions about himself and reading through both informal and formal means. Informally, teachers do this on a daily basis in order to effectively adapt instruction to fit the needs of the students in a particular class at a particular time.

Formally, a number of researchers have created research projects that looked at specific lived experiences in order to help teachers more effectively instruct. McCray, Vaughn, and Neal (2001) created a research project that looked at four specific student responses through student interviews. Those four areas were (a) how well they read, (b) how they had been taught reading, (c) their purpose for involvement in explicit reading instruction, and (d) their reflections on reading instruction that might improve their reading ability. The authors interviewed 20 middle school students, who were provided special education instruction and were willing to be a part of the study. Through the analysis of the interviews, the researchers discussed any and all key ideas that emerged, their findings, and any interpretations that were formed. From these lengthy discussions, the team decided on critical themes or big ideas that appeared through the student responses.

Brevig (2006) explored the phenomona of student reflection while reading. As the teacher researcher she was a facilitator, not a leader, in the small heterogenous group book clubs that she created in her fifth-grade classroom. As she facilitated, she employed two specific strategies for the students to use. Exploratory talk allowed the students to incorporated their written responses to text in a discussion that was driven by the student's own individual thoughts, ideas, and reflections that resonated with the group. These interpertations allowed for a collaborative interpretation of the text. "The perceptions that the students took away from transcations with the text evolved as they have opportunities to engage in authentic conversations with peers" (Brevig, 2006, p. 532).

Brevig (2006) also used reflection. "The individual reflections students came with regard to their selected text, the process of meaning making, or the use of effective reading strategies are not unlike the reflections produced in a mirror or body of water" (Brevig, 2006, p. 532). These reflections captured only a glimpse of thought that existed at a particular moment. Through Brevig's ethnographic notes, she was able to isolate six areas of ideas that the students' discussion and experiences fell into: social interaction, questions, language, text-to-text connections, text-to-self connections, and growth in understanding through talk. Daily observations and questions drove Brevig's inquiry. They were essential to altering her practices to meet the needs of her students. These reflections assisted the students in making literacy events significant and valuable. When reflections are shared, the students have the opportunity to bounce ideas or question off others and to witness the development of new insights.

van Manen and Adams (2009) discuss that one needs to find the phenomenological space conducive to reading and writing. In this found space, one is able to transcend the everyday realities and engage with those realities that are within the text (van Manen & Adams, 2009). By entering this world, the student is able to interact with the text and may have a more meaningful experience, rather than just reading at school in the traditional fashion (i.e., at their desk).

Efferent reading which is often prompted in the basal-reading classroom, relies heavily on extracting information with little attention to aesthetic reading. Oral interpertation promotes personal interest in reading and gives a reason for injecting self in the story, creating a learning atmosphere where comprehension is relevant to the student. (Ortlieb, Cramer, & Cheek Jr., 2007, p. 170)

It is through the process of oral reading that reading is an artistic experience. It is through these types of experiences that the researcher is able to document a rich narrative of the

reading experience through the voices of the real experts – the students themselves (Ortlieb, Cramer, & Cheek Jr., 2007).

A literacy teacher should employ a variety of instructional strategies in order to effectively monitor student progress within the context of reading. The ability to kidwatch, pedagogically reflect, and make informed decisions based on data helps to shape the context in which instuction needs to be implemented (Baker, 2009). Corcoran and Mamalakis (2009) also suggest that the teacher shares the power of the classroom through a shared-inquiry approach. "This shared-inquiry approach begins with the understating that student learning is the most important aspect, and that the student and teachers are partners-in-discovery" (p.138). Effective teachers invite students to take an active role in the classroom learning envirnoment. This multidimensional sense includes teacher's respect for student's ideas, opinions and feelings. It is through the workings of the classroom that the teacher researcher is able to act as a facilitator of discussions rather than the discussion leader. Doing this allows for more observation and documentation of student reflections and percerptions while reading specific pieces.

Reading in today's classrooms has changed the look of literacy. Literacy today needs to be more of an experience in relationship to the outcome of dynamic interaction between a subject (person using literacy) and the object (the literacy technology being used) (Stienkuehler, Black, & Clinton, 2005). Literacy is not just reading a paper textbook. It takes the shape of graphic novels, on-line text books, and multimedia technology in order to actively engage the student. These new literacies require a philosophical reflection that offers a way to document the new sense-movement blends emerging as people experience digital technologies. A researcher can easily employ the research methods of phenemology to gather data to help understand the students proficiency with these new literacies.

In order to effectively gather and organize the lived experiences of particular students in literacy, the teacher can use a number of different strategies to collect the perceptions of the student. Brevig (2006) utilized reflections and ethnographic notes. Pflaum and Bisphop (2004), used drawings with an interview to provide a way for teachers to reach students and examine their thinking about school and for teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of school. Ortlieb, Cramer, and Cheek (2007) used the act of representing and interpreting text through oral dramatic reading. Oral interpretations were used as part of the process of determining the literacy perceptions of both low and high socio-economic levels of fourth-grade students. "In response to readings, students were asked to give a textual description of reading which included thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, and situations that describe the experience of reading obtained through interviews, journal responses, and art" (Ortlieb, Cramer, & Cheeck, 2007, p.171). It is through these different collection processes that teachers are able to gain understanding in the way that students precieve themselves as literate beings.

Factors Influencing Secondary Literacy Instruction Achievement

Not only does a student's ability level play into literacy instruction at the secondary level, but the student's perceptions do as well. By the time a student is in secondary school, he/she may have been in a multitude of intervention programs because of lack of skill. Or, a student could have eeked by doing the bare minimum, and slowly added to his/her skill base. Or there are even those students who have always read above and beyond grade level. These challenges pose unique obstacles for teachers in the secondary environment.

For the longest time, literacy instruction meant traditional reading groups. In elementary school, there were high readers or "blue birds," and there were low/struggling readers who were the "buzzards", or some unimposing bird. This then led to homogeneous grouping of ability in

the secondary school.   Many times, once you were identified as a "buzzard", there was no way to become a "blue bird." These early labels that were given to students, harmlessly, continue to follow the students as he/she progresses through the grade levels.

Reading is an action that begins once the eyes of a child are able to focus. This learning that a child does tends to be unexpected and perhaps complicated as well as transcends the traditional school setting. This learning is not happening within the school day, but in the home. It is natural for children and even adults to want to make sense of the world, to interpret what it must mean. This is no different from reading written language. When an individual is able to make sense of the written world, it is because he/she has encountered it in circumstances that will then make sense to them. Frank Smith (2004) identifies two reasons why some people have trouble learning to read. First might be that a student has been confronted by reading when it is not best for her/him to learn, just as not everyone learns to play the piano or to swim. Secondly, Smith (2004) suggests that another reason why some people have so much trouble learning to read is because they are confused. "Instead of being helped, they've been handicapped" (Smith, 2004, p. 4). Intervention programs begin to be used to help student who have trouble reading. These interventions programs, for some students, become a crutch and the strategies needed are not learned effectively. The student may rely on the intervention to succeed but may not be successful enough to no longer need a particular intervention.

A major goal of education is the successful academic performance of students during the years they are in school. This success prepares students to meet the challenges of employment, higher education, marriage, and family and community life. "The acquisition of reading skills promotes better overall school performance. Reading is an essential skill that enables learners to acquire content knowledge needed to succeed in every academic subject area" (Blanton &

Blanton, 1994, p. 10). Reading is necessary for every aspect of the students educational career and more importantly the careers that he/she chooses when he/she graduates from school.

Like Smith (2004), Wood and Algozzine (1994) identify factors contributing to reading achievement. Reading is a social event that requires active participation. The role of the teacher is to teach the use of strategies and to select instructional activities that ensure a student's active participation in learning. There is also a need to help increase the motivation of students, and their success rate, as well as hold the students to high expectations for success in reading instruction. Smith (2004) uses the term "engagement" for the productive interaction of the learner with demonstrations. "Learning occurs when the learner engages with a demonstration so that it becomes, in effect, the learners' demonstration" (Smith, 2004, p. 205). Wilhelm (2008) writes on the intensity of engagement of readers, stating that the student will use a wide variety of moves to engage with stories, to become an active participant in the story world, to then connect with the virtual world as a real reader, and to reflect upon his/her experiences as a reader.

Time is another factor that contributes to reading achievement. There must be sufficient time allocated for the task and students must be actively engaged academically in the allocated time. This is crucial on the secondary level since time is delineated by class periods and academic subjects. A student's attention to task is crucial with his/her acquisition of reading achievement, especially at the secondary level. It is the teacher's role to intervene with instructional strategies that have the potential to improve a student's ability to focus and sustain attention. A student must also reach a level of automaticity in their decoding skills. By reading meaningful text, Smith (2004) lists some of the advantages to a student: building vocabulary, understanding the possibilities and limitations of letter-sound relationships, developing mediated

word and meaning identification ability, acquiring speed, avoiding tunnel vision, preventing memory overload, relying on senses, acquiring familiarity with such conventions as the appropriate discourse structure, grammar and register, increasing relevant non-visual information and gaining experiences in using it more effectively. Being able to organize and reorganize a student's current and new knowledge is at the heart of learning.

Another crucial factor of literacy instruction and achievement is student awareness of the specific purpose for what he/she reads. By understanding the purpose, the student is able to access prior knowledge, have support in creating prior knowledge, and be willing to take the necessary risks to attack the reading passages. In secondary schools, a student who has not been specifically told the purpose for reading a certain selection may shut down and be reluctant to engage his/her attention in the piece. Initially the responsibility for setting the purpose is on the teacher's shoulders, but as time goes on, that responsibility shifts to the students.

Literacy and reading are related terms encompassing very broad ideas that are included in instruction and achievement. "Reading is too complex a process to refer simply as decoding alphabetic print and making meaning of text" (Alvermann, 2002, p. 190). One must read critically beyond the basic meaning. Effective literacy instruction for adolescents acknowledges that all uses of written language occur in specific places and times as part of the broader societal practices. This effective instruction builds on both the formal and informal literacy achievement of students.

Reading at the secondary level expects the student to be a functional reader. The expectation is that the student is able to navigate at least basically through different types of texts. There is a lack of time to fill in the "holes" that a secondary student comes with in the areas of decoding or comprehension. School districts do have intervention programs in place,

but those teachers are not only fighting with the adolescents' perception that they are not successful, but they are fighting with time in order to ensure that students are prepared for high-stakes testing.

High-Stakes Testing and its Impacts on Reading Instruction

The uses of large-scale state mandated testing have been a reality for teachers and students for the past 30 years (Afflerbach 2009; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris 2001; Horn 2003; Triplett & Barksdale, 2009).   Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983) and the subsequent legislation of the *No Child Left Behind Act (*NCLB, 2002) and now the *Blue Print for Reform* (2010) the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, high-stakes testing is a constant reality in every school district across the country.

The original intent appears to be that high-stakes testing was conceived to formally assess students in order to accurately identify gaps in student knowledge and skills. High-stakes testing has since not only affected the progress and future of students, but also the reputations, salaries, and careers of teachers; and the reputations and status of schools within local communities (Christie, 2007; Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump, 2008). School districts are continually finding ways to make assessment meaningful not only to the teachers but to the students and stakeholders in the communities.

Currently, through the creation of CCSS, two entities have been charged with creating high stakes testing to assess for the acquisition of knowledge utilizing these standards. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SmarterBalanced.org) and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (parcconline.org) have been charged to create.

Both PARCC and Smarter Balance have created new high stakes testing to assess the acquisition of knowledge based upon the CCSS. Both of these new assessments are computer based and allow the students to show their knowledge through multiple choice, short answer and performance based tasks that allow for demonstration of critical-thinking and problem solving skills (parcconline.org, SmartBalance.org). These assessments are aligned with the CCSS and have gone through design and development phases, field testing and are fully operational in the 2014-2015 school year. The state of Kansas has opted not to utilize these assessments but has created English Language Arts state assessment that will include machine-scorable items for both reading and writing, aligned to the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards (KSDE, http://community.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=5605).

Afflerbach (2009) outlines three popular beliefs related to high-stakes testing. First, the public believes that the high-stakes tests are fair. If there are optimal and consistent standardized testing procedures, and that every student taking the test has the same prior knowledge, experiences, and level of test anxiety, the test may be fair. Second, Afflerbach (2009) identifies another reason for test popularity is the public believes high-stakes tests are scientific. The idea that one test can reduce and summarize the complexities of reading into a single raw score and percentile is amazing (Horn, 2003) and, at times, unheard of. Students are much more than a test score. The public hears words like validity and reliability and they assume that these tests accurately describe a student's reading achievement and reading ability (Cawelti, 2006; Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque & Crump, 2008; Horn 2003).

The final popular belief concerning high-stakes testing (Afflerbach, 2009) is that these tests have become popular with the public. School districts administer high-stakes testing on an annual basis from grades 3 to 8 and in grade 11 (Duffy et al., 2008; Horn, 2003; Nichols &

Berliner, 2008). The current high-stakes reading test "limits our ability to know how students read critically, how they evaluate what they read, and how they use the knowledge they gain through reading" (Afflerbach, 2009, p. 154). What is discovered is how they are able to perform on a standardized test, not how well a student understands those tested concepts.

In light of high-stakes testing, teachers are using the data to improve the instruction regardless of the outcome of the testing environments. Teachers are using the data to help strengthen the students' weak areas and continue to expand and increase the critical reading skills. This is not just one discipline's charge. It is the entire school's responsibility to increase the reading skills of each and every student that walks through a teacher's classroom door (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007; Bruce, Getch & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). Especially since more and more special education students are included in the general education classrooms at the secondary level. Unfortunately, focused reading instruction in the other content areas is still not being done on a consistent basis. There still continues to be achievement gaps between Caucasian students, Asian students, African American students and Hispanic students (Anderson et al., 2007; Bruce et al., 2009; Duffy et al., 2008, and Horn 2003).

In the most recent Nation's Report Card for Reading there is an "overall performance in reading declines in comparison to 1992" (NAEP, 2005; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students in grade 12 scored lower in 2005 than 1992, with overall scores in 2005 at 286 (on a scale of 0-500) and 1992 scores at 292 (NAEP, 2005). These scores do not disaggregate for special education students. It is with these results that children are being left behind in their ability to read. This continues to cause legislation and school districts to focus even more on reading instruction and achievement.

These results cause secondary schools across the nation to take notice of the reading instruction that is happening in the classrooms of the country. Kamil (2003) has collected and synthesized research addressing this need for more substantive reading instruction that will allow adolescents to be ready for reading in 21st century. It is no surprise that there has been resistance to isolated reading instruction at the secondary level. School districts have traditionally had programs in place to help the struggling reader but the majority of these programs were housed in the special education arena (Barry, 1997). Today, there is a need for this specialized instruction to flow into the general education environment.

School districts are requiring teachers to be more deliberate in meeting the needs of the students through leveled tiered general education supports (Kansas MTSS, 2009). It is only the most severe challenges in reading abilities and skills at the secondary level that are addressed by special education support.

With any change there will be resistance. Content area teachers do not see reading instruction as part of their jobs and appear to fight the suggestions and support from reading specialists and coaches (Kamil, 2003). In order to combat this resistance at the secondary level, schools should provide high quality, ongoing professional development in literacy (Kamil, 2003). School districts in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Kansas and other states are continually providing teachers with robust professional development in reading instruction. Districts must understand that "teaching reading," especially at the secondary level, is not a one content-area charge. Instructing student on various reading strategies: comprehension, figurative language, text features, different genres, and other concepts and skills, must be welcomed in all classrooms regardless of student ability. All students are subject to high-stakes testing, and the more

knowledge they have, the more commonality they see between content areas, and the more

thinking required of them, will help to build their confidence on the high stakes tests.

Special Education Accommodations on High-Stakes Testing

No Child Left Behind (PL 107-110, 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) focus the attention on the academic achievement of all

students. Since NCLB (2002) require all public school students to participate in statewide

assessments, IDEIA ensures that accommodations and modifications are in place to assist special

education students with the high-stakes testing (Fuchs, Seethaler, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 2008).

These accommodations and modifications identified in students' Individualized Education Plan

(IEP) should (not only should but must be if school will not be in violation) be followed

throughout the school year and not just at testing time. It is the intention of the accommodations

and modification that they level the playing field for special education students.

The accommodations and modifications are individualized for each student (Brinckerhoff

& Banerjee, 2007; Fletcher, Francis, O'Malley, Copeland, Mehta, Caldwell, Kalinoswki, Young,

& Vaugh, 2009). Some students are able to qualify for a modified version of the high-stakes test.

In this case the reading passage is on grade level but the quantity of questions and stems have

been lessened. Students may also receive a read aloud accommodation if his/her reading

disability adversely affect the fairness in his/her ability to complete the high-stakes test. Another

common modification provided to students is the ability to complete the assessment in an

alternative location. This option will lessen distractions for the student.

Testing students with disabilities is not something new. These students take a series of

standardized assessments when they are first considered eligible for special education services.

Subsequently, every three years, a student may be reassessed by another battery of assessments

to see if he/she still qualifies for services (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). The addition of a special education student's inclusion in high-stakes testing documents, again, how he/she is performing. The high-stakes tests are standards based in order to compare students across standards. A special education student is already at a disadvantage. It is already documented that they are behind their peers in abilities. Those challenges in abilities may be greater than the accommodations and modifications that are provided to insure his/her success on high-stakes testing.

Issues in Educating Transient Populations

Not only are teachers trying to instruct students with the most consistent and engaging lessons possible, but they are also dealing with the changing dynamic of a class. High student mobility rates can also disrupt the learning environment in classrooms throughout the school (Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008). School mobility is becoming a larger issue when computing AYP. Research has indicated that reading skills are repeatedly impacted due to a student's mobility (Rhodes, 2008; Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008; Weckstein, 2003).

Rumberger (2003) identified through his review of literature specific causes for student mobility. Student mobility, while high if one looks at the longitudinal career of students in general, is especially high in predominantly minority, urban school districts. While most student mobility is due to a family's residential moving, student requests to move schools and schools asking the adolescent to transfer either because of academic or disciplinary problems also play into the amount of a students' mobility will have in his/her academic career. Titus (2007) also identified that many U.S. students experience mobility on a global scale. "Children of military-connected families who are stationed abroad fall into the global student category" (Titus, 2007, p. 86). The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) enrolls approximately 106,000

students in schools located in the United States and overseas (Smerkar & Owens, 2003). Typically, military personnel will spend three years at one military post before being reassigned. This causes those schools to see a student population turn over 37 percent each school year (Military Family Resource Center, 2009). Mobility also impacts the special education student because educational records may be slow to follow the student's enrollment in a school, causing inaccurate placement in classes often without appropriate support. Appropriate instructional time is wasted because of these mobility aspects.

Studies link to student mobility to math assessments (Swanson & Schneider, 1999), drop out rates (Bracey, 1999), and student achievement (Rhodes, 2008; Rumberger, 2003; Titus, 2007). In the advent of NCLB, a school district must be proactive in helping those students who enroll throughout the school year. If those students' scores do not directly count towards AYP, their attendance for the test does. A student's score is not only based upon what they learn that year, but also on an accumulation of skills in their school career.

Not only does a mobile student need to deal with the politics of the new school district but the personal and/or family problems that may have contributed to their mobility. This could cause additional achievement difficulties and other problems in schools (Rhodes 2008; Rumsberger 2003; Swanson & Schneider, 1999).

Student mobility not only creates challenges for the students but also for their parents and their educators. Student mobility not only varies between students but also between schools. Some challenges that are faced by highly mobile students are transferability for school records and credits (DoDEA, 2009; Rhodes, 2008; Smrekar & Owen, 2003; Titus, 2007). Even though states have similar standards to assess achievement, there are 48 different state assessments (Titus, 2007). Age requirements vary among states, and curriculum differences result in possible

loss of credit. Credits vary due to districts scheduling, courses, and calendars. These are all obstacles that a mobile student may face each time they enter a new school.

Recently, the Common Core Standards have been adopted by 49 states and the District of Columbia (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2010). These standards have been created by government and state officials, as well as teachers, to help unify the standards that students are to achieve. These standards define the knowledge and the skills that a student will have with his/her K-12 school year experience. The CCSS are broken down into two groups: English Language Arts and Math. These standards are the building blocks for the other content areas that student interact with during their school careers.

> Students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so the standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines. It is important to note that the literacy standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects for grades 6–12 are meant to supplement content standards in those areas, not replace them (CCSS, http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/frequently-asked-questions/#faq-2313).

Due to the cyclical nature of these standards, students at varying abilities are able to access and achieve the standards with scaffolding even if they move schools within the school year. These standards will help to create some stability in the educational life of highly mobile students.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings. The lived experiences of the participants will be discussed and organized upon similar themes using phenomenological methods and phenomenological framework.

Phenomenology is both a theoretical framework as well as a method to complete qualitative research. Phenomenology is classified as a form of interpretive inquiry that focuses on human perceptions and experiences (Pinar et al., 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Specifically, it can be categorized as the collection of the human experience. Through a collection of experiences, a researcher is able to describe phenomena that are collectively shared among people. Theoretically, as discussed in Chapter 2, phenomenology rests upon the philosophical assumptions of the study of lived experiences of a person, the view that these experiences are conscious ones and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences, not explanations or analyses (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Therefore, using phenomenology as both a framework and method, I can describe more vividly the experiences of the students that are participating in this study through using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009). In doing so, I aim to find ways to understand and improve secondary special education students' literacies that will help them succeed in the 21st century. The findings of this phenomenological study will make significant contributions to the literature by informing the literacy community of perceptions that secondary special education students have of themselves as literate beings.

Research Questions

The central question of this study is: ***How do secondary special education students perceive themselves as literate beings?***

Questions that are embedded in this central question, and that will be addressed in this study are:

1. How do secondary special education students understand what it means to be literate?

2. What lived experiences do secondary special education students possess that shape their perceptions of being literate?

Research Design

Teachers are constantly evaluating the effectiveness of their instruction in order to have optimal engagement from their students. In subscribing to this thinking, my effectiveness as teacher was impacted by my ability to reflect and identify common themes amongst my students to make my instruction more effective. To do this, I needed to not only be a teacher but a researcher. Teacher research (as defined by Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992) has been rooted in the action research movement of the 1950s (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). This current movement remains in both the teaching and researching communities.

As educational reform evolves, teachers are more often being required to collect data to be used to make systemic instructional changes in their schools curriculum. No longer is a teacher just teaching the mastery of concepts but he/she is also able to use their research as empowerment for not only themselves but their students (Herr, 1999). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) argue that:

what is missing from the knowledge base of teaching are the voices of teachers

themselves, the questions teachers ask, the way teachers use writing and intentional talk

in their work lives, and the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve

their own classroom practices. (pp. 299-300)

Therefore, teachers have the potential to provide perspectives on teaching and learning that a

traditional researcher may not have. The teachers' actions and data matter.

Teachers are researchers in their classrooms without a specific research design. Teachers

are aware of what works for some students and what does not for others. Today "more and more

practitioners are now expected to be the gatherers and interpreters of school and classroom data

as part of larger initiatives to improve school improvement" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.

1). It is the teacher that goes through their classes' data to make effective instructional changes to

instruction.

The opportunity to participate in practitioner inquiry may come from different directions.

One, a teacher may choose to do research with creating a qualitatively new knowledge base.

Alternatively, a teacher may choose to formalize an existing knowledge base through his/her

research. Lastly, teachers may negotiate easier and more congenial access to existing

frameworks and findings (Hubermann, 1996). Therefore, practitioner inquiry may be research

that is very personal to the practitioner or not, though one's decision to do research should

ultimately be voluntary (MacLean & Mohr, 1999).

For some, practitioner research means different things. Teachers' research can be

something as simple as observing a class and keeping a journal about observations, or as

complex as a longitudinal study examining a specific group of students over a longer time

(Bardine, 2010). As a teacher uses his/her classroom to collect data, this research must have meaning.

As a teacher in my second decade, I constantly reflect on what instructional techniques work for which students. Not only do teachers need to be cognizant of the expectations of the curriculums, but they must also listen to the voices of the students in their classes. Those voices and experiences can help to strengthen teachers' facilitation of instruction and help to empower students as thinkers in the world outside of the classroom. However, one must also be aware of the impact their experiences have on their ability to interpret the actions of their students within their classrooms. Reflexivity involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process—what sorts of factors influence the researcher's construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in planning, conducting, and writing up the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Phenomenological Case Study

Traditional designs used in most areas of academic research have not always transferred well to the educational setting. Based upon the experiences I have in my classroom and the priority I have to examine a phenomenon amongst special education students within their natural setting, the scenario suggested the use of phenomenology to focus on the descriptions of the experiences of the participants. "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (van Manen 1990, p. 62). This also is a return to a more traditional task of philosophy (Creswell, 2007). Recently, philosophy has become limited to exploring ideas based solely on their scientific merits. Using phenomenology, I am looking for the wisdom that can be gathered by the experiences of these special education students.

Creswell (2007) outlines the focus of phenomenology as understanding the essence of the experiences from those who are experiencing it. It is the students' experiences that shape the phenomenon that begin to develop through the different experiences of the students. There is the need in the literature to describe the secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings in a high-stakes testing environment. Through studying students' responses of open-ended surveys, interviews and analyzing their responses with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for common themes that emerge, I am able to describe the essence of the students' experiences.

The data that is gathered is the lived experiences of the participants. The most straightforward way to gather experiences is to have the selected individuals write down their experiences (van Manen, 1990). I have done this by soliciting answers to open-ended questions from the selected three students prior to their first interview with me, and then through the texts that are collected, I have been able to uncover themes that are evident and explored those more deeply with the second interviews with the three students. These themes helped me to ask questions of the interview group to gain more resources for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

In choosing to organize the data in a case study form is ideal for the time constraints that are placed upon this study. Case study research is not a methodology in this context but more of an organization type in order to study an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). The bounded system for this study is that of secondary special education students who were in my classroom (English III: American Literature and Modified English III: American Literature) and I report case descriptions and case-based themes that emerge through the lived experiences of these students. Since this study was conducted with

students that I teach, I aim to develop description into specific special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings.

Using the structure of a phenomenogical case study and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis are logical methods for this study. This is consistent with the epistemological position of my research questions. (Smith et al., 2009). The aim as stated by Smith et al., (2009) is to focus on the subjects' experiences and understanding of the particular phenomena that will develop through the analysis of their experiences. The participants have been selected on the basis that they can grant me access to a particular perspective on the phenomena that is being studied. They represent a perspective rather than a population, thus the reason for a homogenous and small sample size (Smith et al., 2009). In looking at secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings, the research centers on the themes that emerge from the participants. Identifying the lived experiences (van Manen, 1990) of the students is what was given.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) also highlight that qualitative research begins with interesting, curious, or anomalous phenomena that one observes, discovers, or stumbles across. It is from this that the researcher then creates a research design to explore further those phenomena that interest them. It is from these observations that the questions and problems come from. Using phenomenological case study, my study is significant as: (Creswell 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Krathwohl, 1998).

1. It will contribute to the knowledge bases.

2. It is relevant to the education community.

3. It will be useful to practitioners.

Research Site

The School District

The school district is the eighth largest school district in a Midwestern state, with a population of more than 7,000 students (based on the 2009-2010 Kansas State Department of Education Report Card) that has since increased to over 8,000 students (based on the 2013-2014 KSDE Report Card). The school district operates 15 elementary schools (K-5), two middle schools (6-8), one high school (9-12), one alternative school, and one early-childhood education center.

When the study began in 2011, the school districts' population consisted of 52.05% male and 47.95% female. Among those students, 47.56% were non-economically disadvantaged and 52.44% were economically disadvantaged. The population was 49.43% white, 20.28% African American, 16.90% Hispanic, and 13.39% other ethnicities. Special Education supports and services are given to 15.1% of the population.

The most recent figures from the KSDE 2013-2014 Report Card show that the district population of males has increased to 52.74% and the females has decreased to 47.26%. The number of economically disadvantaged students in the district have increased to 61.87% and the non-economically disadvantaged decreased to 38.13%. Special education services were received by 15.08% of the student population, down slightly from the 2010-2011 school year.

The graduation rate for this school for the 2011-2012 school year was 75.1% with 33.3% of students receiving special education services graduating. The dropout rate for this school was 2.6%.

The Sunflower High School

In the 2010-2011 school year, the student enrollment at the high school was 1816. The student body was composed of 52.59% male and 47.41% female. Of these students, 68.34% were non-economical disadvantaged and 31.66% economically disadvantaged. Whites accounted for 45.04% of the school's population, 25.22% African American, 14.18% Hispanic, and 14.92% identified as other. As of February 2011, there have been 446 new students added to the high school rolls. This number is comprised of new students to the district and students who enrolled first semester, withdrew, then reenrolled second semester. Also, the high school has lost 227 students due to withdrawal. These numbers are different from previous years where the withdrawal number and enrollment numbers are usually around 300 students each. Of the total student population for the 2010-2011 school year, 15.1% were identified as student with disabilities. Based on the 2013-2014 KDSE Report Card, the high school enrollment has decreased to 1738. Of these students, 53.80% were male and 46.20% were female. The number of students considered economically disadvantaged was 50.46% and the number of non-economically disadvantaged was 46.54%. The number of students receiving special education supports and services decreased slightly to 15.08%.

Among the teachers teaching at the high school during the 2011-2012 school year, 94% were fully licensed and 93.56% of the core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers. Core Content Classes are defined as English/Language Arts, reading, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography (KSDE 2009).

In 2010, the high school achieved AYP in reading and met the state Standard of Excellence in Reading. Among the junior students taking the state assessment in reading, 85.5%

met or exceeded standards. In comparison, during the 2013, 80% of students met or exceeded standards in reading (there was no assessment in 2014).

The high school is broken into four different career academies. Each academy is structured based upon particular interests. One academy is structured for the successful transition from the middle school to the high school. The other three academies are structured for those interested in fine arts and human services; business, industry and technology; and science, engineering and technology. There is some cross-academy enrollment in the core classes (English/language arts, reading, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography) because of enrollment numbers and support personnel for instruction.
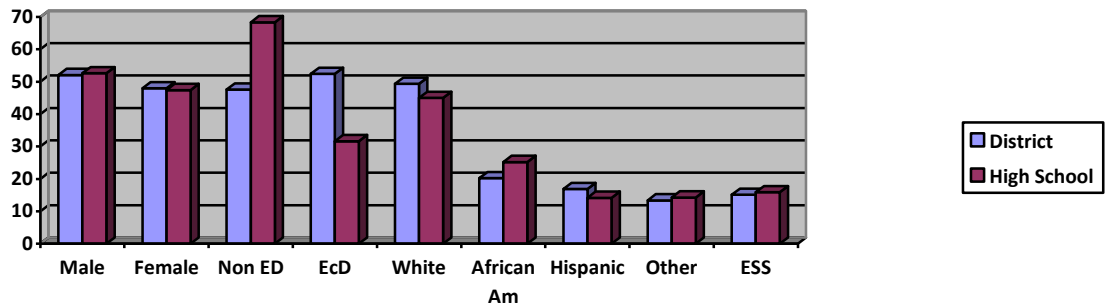
Figure 3.1 Sunflower School District 2010-2011 School Year Percentages
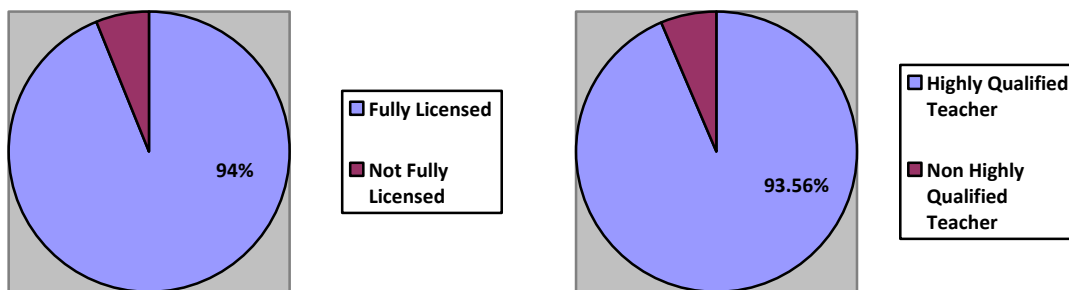
Figure 3.2 Teacher Qualification 2010-2011 School Year

Not only was the traditional brick and mortar school used as a research site but a virtual site was used as well. After the participants graduated from high school, email and social media communication was conducted through the internet.

Participants

At the onset of this study, the participant pool consisted of five students, two males (one white, one African American) and three females (two white and one African American). After the initial interviews and handling scheduling conflicts only three students were able to continue with the study. These participants are students that were enrolled in English III: American Literature and Modified English III: American Literature courses that I taught. Students were solicited from two particular classes taught by an English teacher and with me as the Special Education teacher. The other is comprised of only Special Education students that I taught. The demographics between the two classes are in the 2009-2010 school year. Class A was broken down as follows: 48% male, 53% female; 45.1% African American, 48.3% White, 0.6% Asian; 26% identified needing Special Education Services. Class B consisted of: 50% male and 50% female; 41.6% African American, 50% White and .08 % Asian; 20.8% are identified as needing Special Education
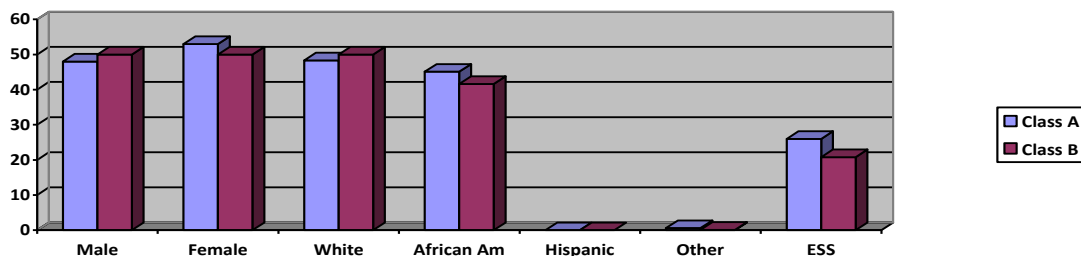
Services

Figure 3.3 Class Demographics 2009-2010 School Year

One white male and two white females participated in this study. All three received special education supports and services within the general education setting. "IPA sampling

67

tends to be purposive and broadly homogenous as a small sample size can provide a sufficient perspective given adequate contextualization" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 49). My aim is to reveal something of the experiences of each individual as well as explore the similarities and differences.

The participants are at the time of the study:

1. Thomas: a white male who received special education supports and services as a student identified with a Specific Learning Disability. It was documented that he had significant delays in Reading, Reading Comprehension, Spelling and Written Expression. Thomas entered the high school as a junior due to his stepfamily's move to the area by the military. He received support through co-teaching in his English classes. Thomas came from a background of divorces, poverty, and mobility. Thomas lived with his stepfather and his stepfathers' wife and their children on the military installation. Today, Thomas lives out of state on his own, working for a technology company and running his own computer repair business.

2. Abigail: a white female who received special education supports and services as a student identified with an Other Health Impairment. Abigail was documented to have Attention- Deficit/ Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), which impacts her ability to access the general education curriculum. She had been at the high school since she was a freshman. She had received services through modified classes as well as co- taught English classes. She lived with her parents and had moved to the area due to a military move when she was in middle school. Abigail's parents are still together and she lived with them and an older brother off the military installation. Today, Abigail

lives on her own, takes classes at the local community college, and works at an early

learning daycare located in the area that the study took place.

3. Emily: a white female who received special education supports and services as a

student identified with a Specific Learning Disability. She was documented to have

below average scores in her Broad Reading and Broad Writing Skills but had average

scores in Broad Math. She had been at the high school since she was a freshman.

Emily's family moved to the area with the military when she was a freshman.   Emily

lived with her parents and younger siblings on the military installation. Today, Emily

lives out of state with her parents, has completed course work as a Licensed Practical

Nurse, and is working towards her Registered Nurse license.

Research Period

The research period consisted of face-to-face interview sessions in the fall of 2011 and

spring of 2012. Prior to being chosen for this project, two of the students were enrolled in Junior

English classes that I co-taught and two students were enrolled in my seminar class. Two of the

students were also on my caseload as a special education IEP manager since their sophomore

year. In the fall of 2011, two of these students were in Senior English classes that I co-taught

and two were enrolled in my seminar class. After these students graduated from high school in

May 2012, communication between us continued through the fall of 2014 via email and social

media.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of the human subjects in this study is of the utmost importance. To ensure

the protection of the participants and in compliance with the policies at Kansas State University,

an application for Institutional Review Board was approved (see Appendix E). Students' identity

remained confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Also the participant had the ability to review the findings of the researcher through fact checking. The participants also had the ability to withdraw completely from the study at any time during or after the interviews and before publication of the results without penalty.

Data Collection

Data collection is vital to any type of research that is collected. In qualitative research, data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Especially, the data for this study was collected from interviews, email correspondence, social media, and in-person conversations in order to capture the essence of the perceptions that students have of themselves as literate beings.

Interview

Interviewing is a data-collection technique relied on quite extensively in qualitative research (Bailey, 2007; Creswell, 2007, & Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In the constructs of phenomenological research, soliciting interviews is paramount to the ability to collect the lived experiences of students (van Manen, 1990). IPA describes it as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Smith et al., 2009 p. 57). Collecting the true voice of a student helps to create an authentic voice to the phenomena identified. The interviews conducted allowed the researcher to direct specific questions related to the overarching research questions for this study. It also allowed the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to gain a better understanding of the special education students' perceptions. The interviews were partially structured and semi-structured (Krathwohl, 2004; Bailey, 2007), with themes and questions chosen but leaving the order, modification, and follow-up questions up to the interviewer. Some of the questions that will be covered can be found in Appendix B.

Participants for interviews were selected from the classes that are junior-level and taking the high-stakes test in reading. The three students who were interviewed, were asked to return the parental permission form to participate. I mailed and handed out in class the permission slip to the identified junior-level special education students who completed taking the high-stakes test

in reading. Of the initial five students, three students followed through with all the interviews. The three participants were also compliant and answered additional interview questions after they had graduated high school and spent a school year either in the work force, in college or did a combination of both.

The interview questions and subsequent questions are related to the overall research questions of this study. The first interview consisted of the open ended questions as well as gaining background and trust from the students. The second interview was based on the interview questions and the students' responses to the open-ended questionnaire that they completed during the first interview. The third interview was conducted in a manner in which the respondents wrote their answers to the questions. Subsequent communication with the three participants was done through emailed and social media communication. The interview sessions lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Once the students graduated in the spring of 2012, email, social media communication and mail correspondence continued through fall of 2014.

Brocki and Wearden (2006), completed a systematized literature review on IPA in health psychology, which looked at studies that used email as a mode of communication. They found that studies showed that email was chosen primarily due to geographical limitations and saw an immediacy that facilitated dialogue and follow-up, as well as prolonged contact between the researcher and the subject.

Interview Protocol

Protocols for conducting interviews entailed the following:

- Mailed out and handed out parent permission for the study since possible participants are minors.
- Scheduled the interviews after the school year was complete, planning 30-45 minutes depending on individuals.

- Met in a comfortable setting within the school building or alternative setting.
- Presented my credentials.
- Reviewed the informed consent. Interviews are only conducted if both parent and student agree.
- First time with student, proceeded with questionnaire and background information
- Second meeting with the student, proceeded with the semi- structured interview; asked follow up questions that emerged from answers.
- Finished interview by thanking participants and asking if he or she have any questions or concerns.
- Subsequent follow-up occurred via email and social media after the subjects graduated from high school.

Observations

Observations entailed the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study. Classroom observations are most commonly used in educational research (Bailey, 1989, Creswell, 2007). Subsequently, observations were made through the timeliness of written responses, activity on social media, and conversations that occurred between myself and the participants. Through these observations, the researcher may learn about behaviors and the meanings attached to those behaviors. Participant observations are a special form of observation and demand purposeful involvement in the events, experiences, and phenomenon being studied (Bailey, 1989; Creswell, 2007).

In this study, I was a participant-observer since I taught junior-level classes that take high-stakes tests in reading. Data consisted of field notes for interactions among students, class reflections and scores reflection after students took the official high-stakes test in reading. Participant observations are beneficial when looking at the lived experiences of the students. I

was in the trenches with the students. I was a part of the students' experiences and thus needed

to be reflexive of the experiences. On the other hand, the participant observations are general

and subjective due to the participant's involvement with those being observed. The observer

must be mindful of his/her interpretations of events and the need to stay as objective as possible.

With the use of the student interview, it helps to counter biases that the participant observer may

have.

Data Analysis: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Analysis is a process of generating, developing, and verifying concepts (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008). Anfara, Brown & Mangione (2002) explain that the process of data analysis is

eclectic; there is no right way. Creswell (2007) also noted there is not one single way to analyze

qualitative data – it is an eclectic process in which the researcher tries to make sense of the

information. Thus, the approaches to data analysis done by qualitative researchers will vary

considerably. "Human science is a *systematic* study of human experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p.

168). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach that

examines how people make sense of their life experiences and exploring those experiences in

their own terms (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2010).

> IPA can be characterized as a set of common processes (e.g. moving from the particular
>
> to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative) and principles (e.g. a
>
> commitment to an understanding of the participant's point of view, and a psychological
>
> focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts) which are applied flexibly,
>
> according to the analytic task. (Smith et al., 2010, p. 79)

For this research, I have analyzed the student responses in the interviews to-reconstruct

the lived experiences of the participants that emerged as phenomenon and reflected on the

significance of those instances. It is through the reflective engagement with the participants'

accounts that I am able to have an interactive process of fluid description and engagement with

the transcripts. This involves flexible thinking, process of reduction, expansion, revision,

creativity and innovation that IPA allows (Smith et al., 2010).

IPA is outlined to have the researcher begin with immersing oneself in the original data.

This is essential in order that the participant becomes the focus of analysis. Repeated reading

allows a model of the overall interview structure to develop, and permits the analyst to gain an

understanding of narratives that can bind certain sections of an interview together. The next step

is to maintain an open mind and note anything of interest within the transcripts. It is important to

conduct close analysis in order to avoid superficial reading. Through this step, the researcher

can begin to identify significant descriptive comments. Another key element is concerned with

the language that the subjects have used, allowing for linguistic comments to be made by the

researcher. Conceptual comments as well as employing strategies of de-contextualization help to

bring into focus the details of the participants' words and meanings.

The third step in IPA (Smith et al., 2010) is the researcher's ability to identify emergent

themes that have developed through the interviews. Once the researcher is able to identify a set

of themes, the next step is to identify how the themes across participants fit together. In this

phase, several methods are employed in theme examination: 1) Abstraction is "identifying

patterns between emergent themes and developing a sense of what can be called a super-ordinate

theme" (Smith et al., 2010, p. 96); 2) Polarization looks at the oppositional and relationships

between themes; 3) Contextualization looks at the connections between emergent themes; 4)

Function, is what themes take in an interview; and 5) Numeration, the frequency with which a

theme is supported all allow the researcher to bring the interviews together.

Therefore, a description of the experiences within the phenomenon studied are written to set aside my preconceived ideas and focus solely on the experiences and perceptions of the students. Demographic and biographical information was described to develop a context of the experiences that are shared from the interview process.

Based on my understanding of IPA, I have developed a list of significant statements and behaviors identified through the questionnaire, interviews, and observations, taking the significant statements and then grouping them into larger units of information or themes. These statements were identified through reading and rereading of the data sources (Smith et al., 2010).

One way that I describe the phenomena is by making comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) between incidents described by the students. This is important because it allows me to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify specific properties and dimensions for the identified category/theme that emerges. This helped me to examine my own assumptions and perspectives of the students interviewed.

During the interview, I may have thought I knew what the student was saying, but when I examined the interview after transcription, I may not have really understood what they expressed. Therefore, I looked at the various levels of meaning and various meanings that can be contained in a word or statement (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), especially if the student was vague in their answer. By doing this, I examined words and phrases that appear in the transcription for each student. If the meaning was vague, I brainstormed other meanings through the context of the interview to determine what the student may have really meant (Smith et al., 2010).

I also looked at the language that the students used in order to express their experiences and perspectives on the understanding of what it means to be a literate being in a high-stakes testing environment (Smith et al., 2010). Since I asked for personal experiences and

perspectives, I expected to look at the expressions and emotions that were expressed throughout the interview. The emotions and feelings that are expressed are important because they are part of the context and are often followed by or associated with actions or inactions on the part of the students (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Smith et al., 2010).

The interview questions focused on the students' experiences as literate beings, but I also asked questions about the students' educational career. Therefore, being aware of the use of the time-specific words helped me to identify shifts and changes in the students' perceptions within their academic careers. "Time words help us to frame events, indicate conditions, and are important when we are trying to identify, connect, and process" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 83).

To organize the analysis and the transcriptions, I employed memos that contained both my analysis and transcription. This action looked at the entirety of the conversations that I had with the students both verbal and written.

From the themes, analysis focused on the textual description of the "what" was experienced and "how" the experience happened. Verbatim examples were provided to highlight the students' voices in this phenomenon. The structural descriptions helped to set the stage of the students' perceptions. Finally, I wrote a composition with both the structural and textual descriptions. This is the essence of the perceptions that students have of themselves as literate beings. This is the culminating aspect of this phenomenological study.

In order to provide valid representation of participants' perspectives, member-checking was used wherein interview participants could review my analysis and provide feedback and corrections.

Accessing the Stories that the Students Tell

I began collecting data by conducting face-to-face interviews with each participant when they were seniors in high school. During these four interviews, the participants each answered identical questions. The participants were encouraged to share experiences that they had growing up in school as well as their literacy practices. Follow-up three interviews were conducted over the next two years through email communication. These interviews allowed me to go deeper into the students' experiences and perceptions about literacy. After exploring my own perceptions as a secondary student and what lived experiences shaped my perceptions of what constitutes a literate being, I began to carefully re-read the participants' interviews and emails that we had shared, those first steps of IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

This close reading of the data allowed me to describe content and deconstruct it to bring detailed focus to the participants' words and meanings. Once completed, I was able to identify developing themes that emerged through the stories that the students told. Through the themes that emerged, I searched for connections between the participants' ten face-to-face interviews and 20 email communications, allowing me to group the significant statements into three common themes of mobility, literacy practices, and learning differences in order to explore the connections more deeply in Chapter 5.

Validating Qualitative Research

Writers of qualitative studies are aware of the importance of validating the qualitative research that has been completed (Bailey, 1989; Creswell, 2007). It is the researchers' goal that they have accurately depicted the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. In doing so, one must be aware of those who do not think that qualitative research is valid.

More so, the language between quantitative validity and qualitative validity is philosophically different. Ideas of internal and external validity, reliability, and accuracy are associated with quantitative research. In looking at validating qualitative phenomenological research, one must look at the notion where the findings or ideas are well grounded and supported (Creswell, 2007). The validity of my qualitative research is addressed by addressing the following questions.

1. Did the researcher influence the content of the participants' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participants' actual experience?

   - To effectively describe the participants, I employed reflexivity to address the obvious interactions that I have had with the students and my own experiences within the themes that have emerged from the participants' lived experiences.

2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?

   - The students' lived experiences are transcribed in their own words by me, with their own sentence structure and context. This is denoted with [sic] after information in analyses directly from the interview transcription.

3. In the analysis of the transcription, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?

   - Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, I have been able to show similarities and differences between the students' lived experiences. It is through that analysis the themes have emerged and are discussed.

4. Is it possible to go from general structural descriptions to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experiences?

- The lived experiences are specific to each participant. There are similarities between each participant overall but each participant has their own experiences.

5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations? (Creswell, 2007, 60-62).

- The lived experiences that are described are context specific for these participants in the stories that they told. Through the context in which they spoke, I was able identify themes that emerged from each participant.

I employed strategies such as creating an audit trail, code-recode strategy, triangulation, peer examination as well as practiced reflexivity to ensure dependability and confirmability of the study (Anfara et al., 2002).

I have established trust with my students by taking an interest in them as people. I had attended athletic events and school functions such as concerts and dances, participated in spirit week activities and others to be seen as a member of our community at school. Within my classrooms, I made sure that I shared my story with them. Identifying my involvement in the participants' school lives allowed me to have a particular lens in which to view them. Having reflexivity allowed me to give insight to the reader about my involvement in this study.

My *Currere*

To effectively analyze the experiences of the research participants, I must first look at my own experiences when I was a secondary student in the 1990s, my *currere* (Moustakes, 1994). *Currere* is one form of curriculum research that is phenomenologically related to the

autobiographical curriculum theory (Pinar et al., 2008). "*Currere* focuses on the educational experiences of an individual as reported by the individual" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 414). When an individual describes their experiences in a curriculum, the researcher (me) is able to sift through their own experiences and reflect on them as they relate to the participants of this study. In using my experiences, my *currere* "that is designed to act as the phenomenological *epoche* slackening the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415), I am able to set aside my experiences in order to have an objective lens to address the experiences that the research participants have. Pinar (1975) explains that this method attempts to reduce the distance between the researcher and their subjects. Pinar notes that this is not a reduction of spatial distance, but of role distance. It is impossible to see the direction of the experiences that the participants bring to the table without reflecting upon what experiences I bring from my past (Kanu & Glor, 2006). Therefore, through the use of IPA, I am able to draw comparisons amongst the participants and to ascertain phenomena that appear through their lived experiences.

My Experience with Literacy as a Secondary Student

When I was in high school, literacy practices were an integral part of my existence. I attended a parochial high school because I knew that I was going to need an edge to get into college. My father and the majority of his family also graduated from this school. I grew up in a family where college was the next step after high school, unless you chose to get a job or joined the military. My father graduated from high school and immediately joined the Air Force. Once his time in the military was up, he joined the work force in an entry-level job at a local bank. Through the years, he did advance in this job but he knew that having more education was necessary for better paying employment.

Once my parents were married and had begun to increase the family, dad worked two fulltime jobs so my mother could stay home and raise my siblings and me. My mother had received her bachelor's degree by going to school at night because she needed to go to work to help with her family's expenses. My parents wanted me (as well as my brother and sister) to have better opportunities available than they had had after high school. They knew this because of struggles they had in the job market with the limited educations that they possessed. Understanding where my parents came from and where they wanted their children to go enabled me to have increased school engagements that strengthened my ability to coordinate multiple skills, such as intellectual development, achievement values and goal setting, writing and test-taking proficiencies, deference to authority, and the ability to follow directions, and have conforming behaviors to school standards (Heard, 2007).

Early on, literacy was a part of my daily life growing up. My mother made sure that we attended story time at our local library each week and sometimes we went to two different libraries. We always had the opportunity to pick out our own books to read. I remember reading *Angelina Ballerina, Eloise at the Plaza,* and any book by Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume. Mom would read to me and then when I got older I would read to my brother and sister as well as the children for whom I babysat. I also would see my parents reading. "Reading aloud to children and shared book reading has been linked to young children's emergent literacy ability, which can be defined as skills or knowledge that children devolve before learning the more conventional skills or reading and writing which affect children's later success" (Duursma, Augustyn, & Zuckerman, 2008, p. 554). My parents were active in increasing the early literacy abilities of our family. The house was filled with big picture books that allowed us to explore places that we had not been to yet. This fostered my love of reading. My parents continued to foster literacy in

our home by rewarding us with new books when we earned good grades. Ironically, even though both parents were in the home, my mother invested more time in the personal care and in managing our lives, whereas my father prioritized his contributions as play, interaction and economic contributions (Heard, 2007). Reflecting on Heard's (2007) research, my family fits his findings.

Reading for pleasure was a daily occurrence for me in high school, as well as a supported activity by my parents. I subscribed to *Seventeen* magazine, and I would read magazines the family subscribed to such as *National Geographic, Good Housekeeping,* and *Reader's Digest.* This helped facilitate conversations with my parents at the dinner table. My parents' involvement was a positive impact on my performance both in primary and secondary school, leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems at school (Clark, 2007). Knowing that my parents were active participants in our education kept my siblings and I more involved as well.

It also encouraged me to widen my literacy interests. The summer after eighth grade, I had the opportunity to be a book reviewer for the local library system. I was assigned a newly released book to read and write a short newspaper column that ran in the local newspaper increasing my literacy practices to publishing to the masses.

I was in high school very early in the Computer Age. I remember having a Commodore 64. My siblings and I would hook up to the TV and create programs to do intricate designs. Unbeknownst to us, we were beginning to do computer programming. Later we had an IBM computer with a green monitor. I used this computer as well as my mom's typewriter from the 1950s to type essays for English and reports for school. I have memories of erasable typing

paper and trying to get the lines to match up when I erased. When I wasn't typing up papers and reports on the computer, I would play Solitaire, and try to write the "Great American Novel." Since I thought my path was to become a writer, I made sure I was active in those types of activities in high school. I was a reporter for the high school newspaper, "The Courier," writing entertainment pieces about social and school-based activities. I was also a contributor for the literary magazine, "Prints and Imprints," having a number of my poems included, since I thought I was the next Emily Dickenson. Even though I thought I was going to be a writer, I had found it hard to put words to paper. Instead, I became and still am a talker. I participated in other extracurricular activities such as school chorus participating in the musicals that our school preformed. Not surprisingly, I was constantly reprimanded for talking in class as well as for passing notes, the only way to communicate between classes at the time.   My friends and family helped me to see myself as a reader writer and a talker, traits that helped me form the identity that I now possess (Kinney, 1993). My literacy practices were formed and evolved through interactions with my friends and family.

We had other technology in our home. We had a television and only received four channels before we signed up for basic cable. We also had a record player and a tape player. I have fond memories of my parents singing along to the music as we danced around the living room. I always had music playing either on my purple, dual cassette boom box or on my Walkman. Whether it was on the radio, my favorite cassette tape, or a CD on repeat, there was always music on.

I was fortunate to have a great support system while in high school. My parents made it a point to know how I was doing in my classes and my parents had high expectations of me. I knew that I needed to do my best not to disappoint them. My friends were equally as supportive.

I hung out with two different groups of people. One group consisted of those who attended

public elementary school like me, before coming to the Catholic high school. This group was

heavily involved in sports. The other group of friends were those who were in the top ten

percent in our high school class. The latter group helped push me academically as I took Honors

Geometry, Honors Physics and prep classes for the SAT's. The "sports" group played softball,

ran cross country, attended many concerts over the summer, and took trips in to Philadelphia or

New York City. All my friends and I would write notes to each other in classes and pass them in

and between classes. We would spend hours on the phone talking and send postcards when we

went on family trips. Kinney (1993) documented that by having a supportive adolescent peer

group as a primary social arena in which adolescents develop a healthy sense of identity as they

experiment with various socials roles and make decisions about their present and future lives.

To the best of my knowledge, students needing special education services were identified

in my high school. There did not seem to be any Special Education teachers, resource

classrooms or Individualized Education Plans implemented. This high school was a parochial

high school and if students did require services and supports, that would be taken care of by the

local public school system on a consultative basis. The school provided instruction based on

tracking. Students were either in the Advanced Placement track or the college prep track. I was a

student in the college prep track. I was able to take honors' classes when I could but mainly

enrolled in classes that fulfilled requirements for admission to colleges.

The student body contained legacy students (parents or grandparents had attended),

students who had attended parochial grammar school in the surrounding area, and public school

systems. Students were driven and excelled both in the classroom and in the varied

extracurricular activities offered. An outsider could identify students who would fall under the

Gifted Education umbrella, enrolled in only honors and Advanced Placement class. One could

also identify students who would qualify today under the identification of Other Health Impaired

(with the diagnosis of ADD or ADHD). I was one of those students. I was that student who

always had the messy desk. I was also that student who was constantly talking in class to my

neighbors and doodling on my papers; my attention always scattered from lectures. When I

would get bored in class, I would roam the hallways, either making a stop at the bathroom or the

nurse's office. I always needed a band aid for a paper cut. I was not one who could stay in one

spot for an extended period. I was also the student who was in everything: softball, chorus,

afterschool jobs, volunteering with two different organizations, play practice, and even cross

country track. I needed to be constantly on the go in order to be able to compartmentalize the

activities I needed to accomplish. My 'to do' lists would constantly need to be revised to get

what needed to be done in a timely fashion.

At parent teacher conferences, my parents continually heard that if I would pay more

attention in class, my grades would be even better. At the time, recognizing various student

learning styles or those who needed modified work was not the norm. If you needed help, you

asked for it and advocated for yourself. I knew that I had certain limitations in the classroom and

needed to work even harder to get the grades that I did get. I made sure that I advocated for

myself to get the accommodations I needed to be successful. There were countless times when I

spent afternoons with my Honors Geometry teacher to have the day's instruction re-taught so I

could ask questions and have repeated practice. I would spend time with my English teachers to

discuss the literature that we were reading since usually on the first read I did not pick up

everything needed for discussions. The accommodations that I sought for myself were also

supported by my parents. My parents made sure that I had the self-efficacy skills that would be

needed once I went to college and entered the real world. They would encourage me to ask questions of my teachers and to spend time after school getting tutored. It was my responsibility to understand the material.

My Own Lived Experiences that Shaped My Perceptions of Being a Literate Being

I never doubted that I was not a literate being. Growing up, my parents were and still are ferocious readers. There were always books lying around the house. There were books and magazines in the "library bag" by the couch and books in the bookcases ready for our hands to reach for them. I was not afraid of reading, even yearned for it. Weekly trips to the local libraries in our area were filled with the excitement for getting a new book or an old favorite to read again. We attended the story times that the libraries, as well as being a part of the summer reading activities at the library. When I was old enough, I was in charge of the summer reading program. These activities even led me to be a volunteer at the library, helping patrons to check out and choose books for their reading. My parents demonstrated positive attitudes towards reading and reading activities that helped create opportunities for me to have positive attitudes towards literacy and develop solid language and literacy skills (Clark 2007; Duursma, Augustyn, & Zuckman, 2008; Heard, 2007).

Books were not the only thing read in our house. The daily newspaper was divided up amongst the different members of my family. The *Reader's Digest* was always in the bathroom and *National Geographic* was on the living room table. At the breakfast table, Mom would be doing the crypto quote, crossword puzzle, and the word jumble.

In school, we had plenty of opportunities to read books for "monthly book reports." I fondly remember creating a diorama for *Ralph S. Mouse*. There were also reading competitions where we counted the books that were read. I remember one year we made a class book paper

chain that hung around the classroom. After recess, our teacher's read-aloud brought stories and

we were able to see them through our imagination. In high school, there was the proverbial

"Summer Reading List." I have fond memories of reading *Gone with the Wind, Rebecca, The*

Plague, Of Human Bondage, To Kill a Mockingbird, and A Separate Peace. We explored the

greats of Shakespeare and Dickens and created visual representations of *Dante's Inferno.*

Since I was in school early in the computer age, we would hope that we were able to sit at

the color monitored computer. In computer class, we learned proper keyboarding techniques,

logo applications, and played games like *Where in the World is Carmen Santiago?* and *The*

Oregon Trail. In high school, computer classes covered typing skills, basic computer

programming and creating spreadsheets and publisher projects. The internet did not exist yet,

and it was not until I was in college that I began to use email to contact friends.   These activities

allowed me to strengthen my digital literacies.

These experiences growing up have shaped my perception of becoming a literate being. I

recognize that I am a person who understands what literacy is and am able to demonstrate

literacy through different modes of communication and can use literacy to navigate through his

or her life world (NCTE, 2008).   These early experiences have continued to foster a growth of

activities that I have participated in to strengthen my ability to continue to build my literacy in

the changing technological world.   I was fortunate enough to have the parental support to

continue my learning both through formal schooling and through other experiences in order to

shape me into the person that I am today. Being a teacher, one needs to always be learning.

Technology has enabled the definition of literacy to evolve. Literacy is a lifelong and social

continuum of skills characterized by one's ability to understand, create and comprehend meaning

through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms (NCTE, 2008).

This understanding of my own literacy practices has greatly influenced my direction of this study. As an educator, I encounter students from many lifestyles with very different upbringing. If I am able to get a glimpse into the perceptions of the students that I have taught, they then too can help educate me to be a better teacher. It is through their experiences I can change assumptions that I may have had when they were students in my classrooms. In turn, I may also be able to help other teachers change their perceptions of similar students.

My Lived Experiences as an Educator

I was that student who knew in high school that I wanted to work with students with special needs. Throughout high school, I had volunteered with an organization that worked with mentally retarded adults, teaching them hand bell music and square dancing. Once I was in college, I worked at a specialized school for students on the Autistic Spectrum. Here I was a teaching assistant and the school employed the discrete trial model for instruction. Working with these two populations showed me that I was able to teach and see growth in people.

In college, I had a double major in Elementary Education and Special Education with a concentration on the Mentally and Physically Handicapped. My focus was students with behavior disorders. I was always up for a challenge. Once I graduated from college, I did what career services tells you not to do, I took the first job offered to me. I taught in an elementary school in Southern Maryland as an Emotional Adjustment teacher. My classroom was comprised of kindergarten to third grade students who were identified as having an emotional disturbance. I focused on getting behaviors under control and then focusing on academics.

This was a challenge. I had students who had some early reading skills but others who were working on phonemic awareness and early reading skills. The district used the 4 Block Method/Balanced Literacy model of reading instruction. While working in this assignment, I realized that my undergraduate background for teaching students to read was lacking. I had some of the most difficult students to instruct in reading and I did not have the appropriate teaching skills to teach them. My students and I trudged through learning to read. I did have bright spots with some students. The joy on their faces when they were able to read a leveled text by themselves told me I was doing something right. Unfortunately, I felt that this population needed a stronger teacher both emotionally and skill wise, so I left this school after just one school year.

My next teaching experience was in a middle school outside of Baltimore. In this setting, I was the special educator assigned to a team of teachers in a particular grade level. I worked with seventh grade for two years, classroom for self-contained sixth /seventh and seventh/eight-grade classroom with a colleague based on student needs for one year, and worked with sixth grade for two years. Primarily, the focus was on student reading comprehension in the content areas rather than being able to decode. But as federal legislation and students weaknesses were glaring, the school district invested in intervention programs and then a new reading curriculum for those students reading below grade level. I became the lead teacher in implementing Soar for Success and Fast Forward reading intervention programs purchased by the district.

It was during my tenure at this middle school that I began graduate work in reading. I knew I needed to improve my knowledge base for teaching reading, which I worked towards a Master's degree in Education, focusing on becoming a Reading Specialist. Through this degree, I became well versed in identifying reading difficulties and providing instruction to focus on

filling the hole that students had in their reading abilities.   It was also during this time, that I became aware that students in middle school had a valid voice to hear when helping them to be better readers. It seemed that no one had ever asked them about their perceptions on being literate beings. My wheels began to spin on ways to help other teachers hear these voices and improve the instruction to students with weaknesses in reading.

My teaching career then took me to the middle of the United States and to high school. I had worried that the diverse, transient and economically challenging population of students that I had just spent years with would be able to be transferred to the middle of the U.S.. Much to my surprise, the experiences that I had in the suburbs of Washington DC and Baltimore Maryland, would help me with the unique population of students who lived outside a large military base in the middle of the United States. My role at my new school started with teaching modified English classes to special education students, co-teaching in general education English classes and even teaching a reading intervention program. The focus of high school is to comprehend the material presented in order to help students graduate high school and either become ready for the work force or attend college. High school students are very vocal about who they are as people. But once again, no one was asking them what they thought about their perception of themselves as literate beings. I wanted to improve my knowledge base on adolescent literacy, so I went back to school again. I wanted to be able to gain more insight about the adolescent reader and add to the knowledge base for other educators. This is what brings me here.

After almost twenty years as a professional educator and even more years as a learner, my focus in special education has not wavered. I have found that I needed to continue my education in order to be a more influential educator. I have felt that if I am a model for my students, they can see that no matter what, they can succeed despite their learning differences. It

is even more evident when listening to students and understanding their own perceptions that

educators can make more of an impact.

CHAPTER 4 - The Lived Experiences That Were Shared

In this chapter, I begin the analysis of the phenomenon of secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings through the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This phenomenon is comprised of the special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings as well as exploring the lived experiences that have shaped their perceptions of being literate.

In order to describe the phenomenon of these special education students, I have applied IPA. The primary concern of IPA is the lived experiences of the participant and the meaning which the participant makes of that lived experience. The end result is always an account how the analyst thinks the participants are thinking (Smith et al., 2009). These lived experiences will be discussed in Chapter 5 based on the themes that have emerged through the interviews and make connections between the participants of those themes (Smith et. al., 2009).

The Lived Experiences

In this section, I, as a participant observer who taught these students, describe the experiences of each participant as they engaged in experiences as a special education student in school in relation to my interactions with them. In addition, I describe their experiences that shaped their perceptions of being a literate being. In these descriptions, exact transcriptions from interviews during their senior year , email and social media communications after they graduated high school and observations when they were juniors will be used. These descriptions will be shaped in the words of each participant, allowing their words to convey their perceptions and feelings.

Thomas-The Computer Savvy Talker

Thomas entered Sunflower High School as a Junior transfer student to the high school I taught at. I met him because he was assigned to my seminar class as well as a student on my caseload. Seminar was intended to be a study hall for students; students were allowed to see teachers, get help on classwork or homework and make up tests. Thomas was a good looking kid, who has the build of a hockey player. He spent time in seminar catching up on homework and exploring the web for news stories that interested him. There would be many times that he would just talk my ear off about current events that interested him and cars. He would also advocate for himself if he needed to see a teacher to get clarification on content or what he was to do for homework. I never had to question him about seeing his teachers. Thomas was always aware of what he needed to do, what he did not complete and what he needed assistance in. Thomas excelled in classes that required hands on application. He enjoyed his auto technology classes as well as any and all of the computer technology classes that he enrolled in. He was my go to person when my school computer was acting up. Thomas was and still is a very responsible individual, who seemed to connect more with the adults than with other students. This is because he had to be the adult/parent for his siblings growing up.

Thomas was identified as a student with a specific learning disability prior to enrolling at the high school. He received this identification due to significant delays in reading, reading comprehension, spelling and written expression. Thomas received special education services at the high school in co taught English classes and additional adult assistance to access the general education curriculum in science and social studies classes. In co-taught classes, there were a general educator and a special educator teaching and modifying the content. Thomas did receive specific accommodations due to his disability across content areas in the form of repeated

directions, use of graphic organizers, use of an alternative testing location away from distractions and extended time to complete assignments.

I interacted with Thomas in the role of a mentor more than a teacher. Early in my relationship with Thomas, we were always talking about his future: was he to stay in Kansas?; move with his family to Hawaii when they changed duty stations?; move back to New York?; go to college?; or even start his own business. I made sure that I fostered these conversations because Thomas was focused to graduate from high school early and knew that he wanted to be successful.

Prior to his attendance at the Sunflower High School, Thomas grew up in New York State. Thomas' experiences in New York were rocky.

Moving, again…..

Moving when he was a kid was not the most stable experience for him. Thomas moved over ten times in elementary school before his parents had divorced.

> The moving around affected me a lot because I would get settled in and get the
>
> understanding of a teacher and how things should be done and then get told we
>
> were moving. This caused me to be less motivated and find ways to just get by in
>
> school. [sic]

As can be seen with Thomas, he sought the stability of school and yearned to have that stability, but over time, his frustrations with moving caused him to become compliant and fade into the background of his schooling early on.

> The reason I had to move so much was because my mother couldn't afford the rent
>
> because of my stepfather would buy beer and Marijuana. Most times we would have to
>
> cut back on food so we would only eat 1 or 2 times a day. What's sad is my body

accepted it and learned that way of life so now I will only eat once a day and it's usually

Dinnertime.   [sic]

Not only was Thomas worried about school, he was worried about when he would get his next meal. He needed to access the life literacies that he possessed to allow for him to be successful in creating stability for his siblings. This created a resiliency in him that still continues today.

During these times, Thomas would live with his brothers and sisters and a parent or two. He did not have a lot of time to play with friends of stay over his friend's house because he made sure his siblings were taken care of. Thomas' parents did drugs and committed crimes. This destroyed his childhood. When his parents got help, they would try to get back on their feet.

My friends are my family. My best friend Alex is a brother to me, is always there

For me and always there to pick me back up with I am down. My other friends

are the same, always there and ready to help. But if my friends were ever in need

of help, I would make sure they were helped and brought back to their feet. [sic]

Thomas' friends created the stable family structure that he was lacking from his biological family. His friend's ability to not pass judgment on his home life and be his sounding board for frustrations created strong bonds that are still seen today.

Thomas accepted the fact that he is here to help his brother and sisters and accept what life throws at him. Of the places that he did live, Thomas' favorite place to live was his Grandfather's house. His Grandfather was a constant source of support. Thomas' grandfather was there to support him in school and make sure that he was doing the right thing even though Thomas' circumstances were not the greatest.

My other teacher that got me through the tough times was my grandfather. Now you

might ask why he is a teacher. He taught me everything to know about living, taking care

of family, how to be a successful person in life. How to make a $20 last a week. The small things in life that counts/ matters. [sic]

When he died, Thomas' relationships with other family members died too.

Well the reason my life was so rocky back when I was a kid was because my parents really didn't have a great Structure so to say. My mother at the time was 22ish with 4 kids and a husband that was an Alcoholic/ drug user. So it was kind of rough sometimes. I think the reason they were rough were because my Stepdad (mom's husband) was really never around and didn't care a whole lot about me or my stepbrother and sisters. Being my mother had to support 4 kids and find a place to live with a fix income of 25-30k a year was kind of hard. I remember being 11 or 12 having to share a bed with my little brother and my sisters would have to share their bed with each other. We accepted the fact. This being said we made it work and dealt with it. I remember asking my grandfather why he would drink so much and what cause him to go down this depression state of mind. The response was because 'I lost my family and couldn't keep everyone together anymore'. The reason he lost control of the family was because of what my mother and stepfather did and acted. [sic]

After his biological mother and stepfather divorced, Thomas was old enough and able to choose where he wanted to live.

Thomas was fortunate that he was able to end up with his Stepdad and his Stepdad's new wife. This new family structure enabled him to have a supportive environment for the last two years of high school. He was now part of a family where there was some stability (even though this family is part of the military) and has two more brothers and a family dog.

My Siblings are younger.   Julia is 17, Natalie is 16 and Chris is 14.   Well I actually haven't talked to them in about 3 months.   About 2-3 years ago I lived with them on Fort Riley Military Base.   Now that they're Over in Hawaii and I wanted to go back to New York State to get my degree in IT, I left.   That day was the hardest day of my life saying good-bye. I never had them leave my side but being I know there going to get taken care of and etc. I accepted the fact.   When I am not running around with my head chop off because of work I try to contact them but being most nights its 1-2am in NY I am not going to call them at 10-11pm at night.   [sic]

Thomas made sure that he overcame the stereotype of a turbulent childhood and not being successful to being a success in school. Even though Thomas' home life was in constant flux, he has some distinct memories of school.

In elementary school, Thomas was able to identify that he learned differently.

In my elementary years, I was a little pain in the ass that didn't care. It was 3rd or 4th grade that I actually realized my numbers and even spelling were kinda flipping upside down and etc. I always assumed that was normal. Until I actually realized I had something wrong with me. But I realized why the other students would pick on me or say stupid stuff.   But it never put me down because of what my grandfather always told me. "Always show yourself as the better person, don't make a fool out of yourself and stand tall."   My grandfather always said something about "Hold Fast" well I didn't understand that meaning until I was older. The meaning is "I dig in but I stand my ground". Years after my grandfather passing I realized why my grandfather always watched Highlander. It made him think he was back home with family. [sic]

Much of Thomas' negative attitude can be contributed to his unsettling home life. But Thomas did not let the negative effects of his life hold him back. He valued the wisdom that his grandfather gave him and looked for outlets for his frustrations.

Being Dyslexic- Not a Shield

As Thomas juggled his family life, school was a place of calm. He remembers having difficulty with reversing numbers and letters. Thomas would study with his buddies and goof off when he would get to big words. In school,

> I remember going to a resource room and they read all my test to me and stuff like
>
> that. [sic]

Utilizing the resource room was frustrating to Thomas. Being pulled out of class made him appear different to his classmates. He did not want to be seen as different. He wanted to be seen like his peers. One way that he achieved this was being the clown of the class.

> I really didn't learn much being I kind of didn't pay attention. But looking back I should
>
> have paid more attention and got better grades because I could have landed a better
>
> paying job or better education. But where I am know I feel I did good but seeing now I
>
> know I could of landed a better education. [sic]

As he matured to a young adult, Thomas was able to reflect on his actions when he was younger and understand the support that he was given to enable to him to be successful.

> When I got went into 8-9th grade, I had taken Geometry. Both of those years were hard.
>
> My numbers were always getting mixed up and I was clueless. But what made me
>
> actually get through it was having the help of a class room environment of 10 students to
>
> 1 teacher. I loved it I can ask questions and actually learn more details on how to solve
>
> the issue. [sic]

A common theme is developing in Thomas' life. Numbers and letters are reversed, home life is in disarray and Thomas wanted to be successful.

> Well I found out my freshman year at LaSalle in NY. What happen was I couldn't read properly and print the words the correct way on the paper. What my Brain would do is flip the words and letters. (Example Apple > elppA.) It didn't affect me until I had an issue with Geometry and Trig. Math class where you have all of the signs and numbers. [sic]

Thomas was able to have the awareness that something was wrong with the way that he read. Once Thomas was identified as having a Specific Learning disability, his academic life was able to find some stability.

> When I first started getting help with it I felt weird and was kind of made fun of from other kids but being having great Teachers helping me I had them explain to my "classmates" what it's about and how I have to learn things differently. My family didn't care they were too worried about their lives and at that time my grandfather was already passed [sic]

Negative family engagement could have let Thomas slip through the cracks, but he did have a family member advocate to have him tested for special education. Thomas never came out and said which family member advocated for him, but I would say that it was his grandfather. Not knowing if there was a formal request for special education testing from the parents or from the school system, it is evident that he did have an advocate. Through that process, it was identified that Thomas had the reading disability of dyslexia.

> Thomas had been on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in elementary school. He did not want his dyslexia

to be used as a shield. I want to break the shield and keep going, trying to do the

best that I can. [sic]

Through high school Thomas was concerned about just passing and making sure he did

not mess up. He was great at helping teachers and classmates with computers, as well as an

advocate for himself. He was able to show his self-efficacy skills.

When I was at LaSalle I came to realize all of the teaching staff there wanted you to

become the best you can. They were always there to help and give advice. I had this one

teacher Mrs. Sherling she was my Cal. (Math) teacher, she actually broke it down for

me to a form that I actually can grasp and gather the proper information. I really don't

know how to explain it. [sic]

With moving to Sunflower High School, Thomas was comfortable with asking teachers

questions. He felt that his teachers were there for him. Thomas had certain accommodations and

modifications afforded to him as a student with a disability. While at Sunflower High School,

Thomas was a student in co-taught classes as well as classes with additional adult assistance to

help him access the general education curriculum. Having accommodations and modifications,

doesn't make me feel like I'm rushing through it. Say I got a 300 questions for a

test and I can take my time and not rush through it. So I don't get a failing grade. [sic]

This accommodation gave him the ability to have a level playing field against his non identified

peers.

I was pulled out of class to have people help me with my reading when they found out I

was dyslexic. I didn't get told about it until 9th grade. I just kept to myself. [sic]

An accommodation that many students have is the ability to have extended time to complete

assignments. Thomas, as he got older, was not afraid of the sigma that being pulled out from a

class may have on him. He knew that utilizing the accommodations that were legally available

to him would allow him a level playing field with his peers. These accommodations and

teachers who took an active interest in his well-being only strengthened his desire to be

successful.

> I will say this there is only one person that I felt that they actually cared and pushed me
>
> threw to make sure I become the best I can with my learning disability was Mrs.
>
> McNemar. She would actually make sure you understanding and not just saying oh yea I
>
> get it and etc. She really wanted you to learn how to operate and become top notch with
>
> the learn disability. If anything I feel she made me get a better grasp and learning curve
>
> of what should be done. [sic]

Thomas' teachers were a source of stability and understanding for him. The teachers that he

remembers fondly have made lasting impacts in his life literacies. They saw Thomas for who he

was, not where he came from or what was wrong with him.

> The social studies (Miss York) at high school helped me gain a better understanding of
>
> what is needed for the assignments, she would break it down to simple steps and it would
>
> click. The best part I loved about the class and how she taught it was she would go
>
> through each chapter via PowerPoint and give the class a more hands on experience with
>
> learning the American history. [sic]

Thomas had teachers who were able to tap into his interests and strengths to help him be

successful in class. By making the learning meaningful to Thomas, it allowed him to have

success within the classroom despite his learning disability.

> I kept to myself a whole lot unless I was hanging out with someone and they
>
> noticed it. But they really didn't say anything. [sic]

Thomas was also fortunate that he had teachers who took an interest in his well-being while in school. Having an IEP did not hold Thomas back in the least. This was evident in Thomas' ability to graduate early from high school. He was able to graduate a semester earlier than most of his peers from high school, which is an accomplishment for even the non-identified student.

Thomas did not use his learning disability as a shield. He broke through the stereotypes of special education students and succeeded when others with similar backgrounds did not succeed.

Computers are my thing: A nerdy kid

I was the nerdy kid at school. [sic]

Thomas equated being a nerd at school through his knowledge of computers. An outlet for Thomas' frustrations in his childhood were computers. This interest allowed him to excel in an area that his friends did not know much about.

Well I started being a nerdy kid when I got my hands on an old Pentium 3 computer and open the case. My first computer was an HP Compaq with Windows 95. The computer was cool back them. So when my mom had DSL Internet installed I was able to surf the web and etc. What really made me get into them was I downloaded this cool matrix game and it was flashing these 0s and 1s and all types of stuff. So I was surfing the web now let me remind you were on Aol 1.0 and it connected to the phone line so you would here this weird scratching noise and when someone called in it would drop internet connection hey great technology back then. When I was 8 or 9 I got a Virus on my computer and it wouldn't boot property and etc. I would use the school computer and search how to fix computer and what is needed etc. Well, I learned how to install my first Operating

System at 9 years old. Anyways this being said I felt I was a computer nerd and had a

great talent. [sic]

At this young age, Thomas was able to possess strong literacy skills to understand, create and

comprehend meaning through foreign computer languages, thus strengthening his life literacy

skills.

Thomas, also, excelled at computer application during high school.

I remember being at a school in NY and showing off to my friends that I could

change grades by hacking in to the Gradebook Application on the school server.

[sic]

This action resulted in a suspension but it helped to further Thomas' future employment

interests. Thomas used this interest to parlay it into employment opportunities. Currently, he is a

Network Administrator at an energy consulting and technology company as well as owning his

own business as Network and Security Engineer.

Am I Literate?

Thomas' approach to literacy was a subtle one. To him, being literate

that is an everyday experience and having what you need to be successful. [sic]

Thomas is a person who uses technology on a daily basis in his personal and professional life

without the realization that he is being a highly literate person.

Being literate in this world is a must, you need to be able to read and write in any

Business field or job. I was not a fan of school nor did I read a lot but learning the basics

really helps me out on every day task. If I did not know how to write a Check or operate

a piece of software I would not be successful in my business.   Being able to operate the

smallest tasks like reading a computer application log or manual gets you threw the

104

troubleshooting steps that are needed. Knowing another form of language is also a great

key to have. I know 4 different computer languages offered and can operate using them.

I feel my life experience would be different if I did not know how to operate or read. [sic]

The computer languages that Thomas knows show the high level of literacy skills that he possess

in the career world. It is his ability to comprehend and create in these languages that show how

strong his literacy skills are.

In his personal life, Thomas was a literate being. Thomas kept in contact with friends and

family through social media. He frequently posted to his Facebook pages. Here he was able to

communicate with friends and family members across the world.   Thomas was able to

communicate his personal views through his ability to post in these social forums.

Ironically, Thomas was ambivalent if he is a literate person. Thomas identifies

characteristics of a literate person in himself as

> You practice at it. If you are in a class that interest you, you need to get the full
>
> amount of knowledge out of it.   It needs to be something you are interested in. I
>
> enjoy reading about computers and stuff like automotive and stuff but not English
>
> stories. [sic]

Thomas engages in social literacy experiences that interest him. Interacting in text that he enjoys

helped to strengthen his literacy skills, regardless of his perceptions.

> I truly think I am okay, I'm not the best and need to make myself become a more
>
> involved Reader and learn to switch long words backwards and say them wrong.
>
> [sic]
>
> I read about 2-2.5 hours a night if not more but if I turn music on and just sit in a
>
> place just read. Music helps me out country mostly. [sic]

The majority of the types of literacy that Thomas interacts with in his daily life are those in print (magazines) and electronic form.   He sees "easy reading" as reading

> Like the newspaper, Yahoo News, and anything on the Internet. Difficult
>
> would have to be the English Comp Books Big words got me beat but I try to
>
> Google the word and figure out the work and how I can remember it. [sic]
>
> I research more about things that interest me. I spend time on the internet getting lost in
>
> different links that I find interesting. In English, I enjoyed something's like <u>Of Mice and</u>
>
> <u>Men</u>, then I Googled more information about that. I needed to know how to navigate
>
> Google on the computer. [sic]

Thomas is one such student that does not stay in the traditional confines of a book, but accesses information that interests him in modes that are more usable for him. He is more than proficient in technical reading

> I read Microsoft logs and Service manuals for networking tools.   I do a lot of online
>
> searching for information if I can't solve or figure out the computer applications issues.
>
> [sic]

Thomas is able to navigate the internet thorough his literacy skills to identify information that is viable for his needs. He has to employ deductive reasoning skills as well as the ability to read technical pieces in order to achieve his tasks. For someone who does not think he is a literate person, he demonstrates daily that he is a literate being.

> I have an app for that. Or I text my friends. [sic]

Thomas engages in literacy without even identifying that he is. The idea of literacy from the traditional reading and writing on paper has evolved to the technological age and that is the space that Thomas feels more comfortable in.

He communicates with others through the spoken word as he speaks intelligently on computer programing when he explains these ideas to the people that he works with. He also communicates effectively with his friends and other professionals that he interacts with. Thomas also uses email as a way to keep in touch with those friends that he has not seen in a while. This allows him to effectively convey meaning through writing. Even in the digital age of texting, he is effectively displaying that he is a literate being. These practices are those that he does not expect to see in the definition of being a literate person but do show that he is just that.

Abigail- The Shy Tomboy Reluctant Reader

I met Abigail in a Junior English co-taught class. She had been enrolled in the high school since she was a freshman. She was a quiet student who kept to herself until she felt you would not judge her. She was a tomboy. I do not think I ever saw her in a dress or a skirt. She always tried her best when in class and was not afraid to ask for help. She was an advocate for herself and had the support of her parents. She would frequently come to my seminar class to work on assignments that were assigned for all her classes. I knew that she saw me as a person to help and did not see herself as someone who could not do well. Abigail never wanted to use her disability as a crutch instead she knew how to advocate for herself, knew what her accommodations and modifications were and made sure that she had access to them.

Abigail received special education supports and services as a student with an exceptionality identified as Other Health Impairment due to a medical diagnosis of Attention Deficit- Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In the classroom, Abigail received the accommodations of tests and texts read aloud when decoding was not being assessed, and extended time to complete assignments and assessments. She also received the modification of modified materials, specifically reading materials needed to be on her independent level should she be

107

required to read a text to complete an independent assignment. This was specifically used when there was not an audio version of the text. Abigail also received the modification of being graded for quality over quantity for extended assignments. For example, if the assignment was a five page essay, Abigail had the option to complete the essay in less pages but still with the same content requirements. She received support through co-taught classes in English, math, science and social studies. In this setting, it was easier for Abigail to receive modifications for her weaknesses because the special educator made sure that the modifications were available to her.

Abigail would be one of the first students who would seek me out once directions were given in class. She would make sure she understood what was being asked of her for the specific assignments. It would be during these discussions that I would make the appropriate accommodation or modification for the assignment. Abigail was never embarrassed that she needed additional support or to be seen with me (the special educator in the classroom). Abigail then would make sure that it was okay for her to come to my seminar to complete the classwork if she did not get it finished or work on the homework that was assigned. It was from her advocacy that she had an open pass to my seminar class. Even if she did not have English work to complete, she would come to my seminar because she knew that it was a safe environment to work in. She was an advocate for herself in her high school experience.

Again, another military move

Abigail has been in the Sunflower School District off and on for her entire school career. She was a student in my co-taught English III and English IV classes. She was a tomboy who kept to herself. She was a military brat,

I was born in Georgia, lived in Maryland, Germany, Oregon, Florida and here.

That's about it. [sic]

Abigail moved frequently because of changes in duty station for her father.

> Growing up I've moved many times my family and I lived in Georgia, Maryland, Florida, Oregon, Germany, and Kansas. Each placed I lived was always an experience to remember because I knew it wouldn't last forever. Living in Maryland it was so amazing to live next to the ocean. Being able to see all the aquatic animals.   But then we moved to Kansas and the ocean was gone now its flat lands. Moving was always hard you had to pack up and go to a new place start new school try to fit in with the new group of people I was faced with. The older I got the harder it was to move I just wanted to stay with the people I called my friends. My favorite place to live was Maryland for the beautiful landscape. But Kansas I can finally call home. [sic]

Abigail was able to experience different places while she was growing up. Even though she was living on United States military bases, she also was able to explore the different places that she lived with her family. She learned how to experience a foreign country with the help of her parents. These experiences added to her background knowledge when she was in school as well her life literacies.

Where am I going to school, now?

> Moving around in a military family was never easy but what helped Abigail was that her family (mom, dad and older brother) were always supportive of her in these transitions.

> I have a really good relationship with my family. Even though my mom and I butt heads. I always know I can go to them any time I struggle in life. I always rely on my dad to fix my stuff that is broken. [sic]

Fortunately for Abigail, she had the support of her family during these moves to help her transition between schools and in making new friends.

Even though Abigail moved around a lot, she does have memories of her schools that she went to. When she was very little, Abigail started Kindergarten in Germany and then moved to the Sunflower School District to finish the year.

> Germany was where I started Kindergarten and then moved here. I did part of the rest of K then since I didn't pass K well, I did but my mom was like 'she's not ready" so then I went to another school and that is where I completed K all at once. So I had to repeat Kindergarten. [sic]

Early in her academic career, it was identified that Abigail was learning at a different rate than her peers. In order to help to strengthen her early learning skills, her parents decided to retain her for a year in Kindergarten.

> I remember parts of K but then I never really knew I restarted Kindergarten but I just thought it was part of it. It wasn't until I got older that my mom told me I repeated Kindergarten. [sic]

This affected Abigail by making her not feel too smart but it did not make her feel different.

> I felt like I belonged with those kids that I grew up with. [sic]

Abigail was the type of student who wanted to belong despite her learning differences. She was one who had a close circle of friends that she held near and dear to her heart.

> Moving around while being in school was always hard because each school was always different and a lot of the time they were ahead of what I learned. When they were ahead in whatever the class was, I had to work harder in class then everyone else and I struggled in school as it is, but I did the best I could to get caught up in class to be normal like the rest of the class. The hardest thing was trying to get caught up with the rest of the class

when I moved and having the teacher understand I struggled in some parts. But the
easiest thing was I could always have a fresh start when I went to a new place. [sic]

But through the support of her family she was able to overcome that feeling and
persevere through the next phases of her schools no matter where she was.

My mom would make sure that teachers knew that I learned differently and that I needed
more time to do things. This embarrassed me as I got older. [sic]

Abigail's different ability to learn was because of her inability to maintain attention to tasks.
This medical diagnosis of ADHD allowed for Abigail, her parents and school to be able to
attribute some of her difficulties in accessing general education instruction. Abigail needed to
put more effort into focusing on tasks than understanding concepts that we taught in class. This
then caused Abigail to miss essential instruction in reading, and required interventions to reteach
those skills in special education.

Abigail's mother advocated for Abigail when she was younger. But as she got older and
more aware of her learning differences, she did not want her weaknesses to be seen as different.
She wanted to be just like her peers.

Family support is essential for the highly mobile student. Even though Abigail may be
embarrassed by this support, it is helpful for her new schools. To compound this idea, Abigail
also brings with her the need for specialized instruction due to her disability.

When Abigail was entering sixth grade, her family moved again. This time the family
moved to Maryland where she completed all of middle school. Her main fear of this move was
that I was really worried that I would not know any one since all my friends were back in
Kansas. I actually did meet people that I knew back then, just because of being a military
family. [sic]

Worrying about her social structure is concerning especially at the beginning of adolescence. Without the support of her family, she could have a negative trajectory of engagement in school, but Abigail does not.

Learning my own way

During both elementary and middle school, Abigail knew that her ability to learn was different from some of her friends. In fourth grade she remembered needing help when it came to reading.

> Every so often I would go to the counselors' office at the elementary school and they would see how far I was developing. [sic]

Triennial reevaluations are a part of the eligibility process for special education. During this process, professionals identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses that a student posseses. For Abigail, it was identified that she had a weakness in reading.

> Reading is something that is hard for me, especially understanding what I read. And sometimes getting left behind when everyone else reads faster. [sic]

Early on in her educational career, Abigail was aware of her learning differences. Through her family's support and the interventions that were in place to aid in her success, she was able to be successful in her endeavors.

> In school, Abigail received additional support since she had an individualized education plan (IEP) as a student with an Other Health Impairment of ADHD. This impacted her ability to attend to tasks when it specifically came to reading.

> In elementary school, it seemed like I was the only one that needed help. I always had a para next to me. When you are that age they had to stay with you. I knew I needed help and that they were there to help me, it never really bothered me. [sic]

112

Having a strong sense of being allowed Abigail to understand that she needed academic support to help her access the general education curriculum.

> In middle school, I was put in a class where we all needed help but there were certain people who needed more help, but I think that I was one of them. The class was smaller and I had a teacher and a para. The students in the class were of mixed ability and that there were some behavior kids in there too. [sic]

In middle school, Abigail's educational placement bothered her. She did not feel that she should have been in that type of class because it was harder for her to focus. She persevered and adjusted to it and understood that that was a place that could help her get better. When Abigail entered high school,

> The biggest challenge I overcame is reading and spelling. Going to high school I was not at a high reading level and was in a modified class to help me. Sophomore year I was able to be in regular classes. I struggled A LOT but with some help I did fantastic in every class I took. [sic]

By being in a modified class, Abigail was more like the other kids but knew that there were people there to help if she needed it. She was shy about asking for help in front of her classmates, but, if she was struggling she would make sure that she talked to the teacher/s or para when no one was watching. She did not want to be seen as different from her peers.

> Even outside of school, Abigail was able to have a support system to help her succeed.
>
> Everyone I ask for help is willing, that makes it easy on me and my parents are
>
> a big help with that. My mom will read things to me. [sic]

Abigail, unlike Thomas, had the family support at home to help her strengthen her literacy skills.

I'm not a reader

Abigail viewed being a literate person as the ability to know English and concepts in English class, like grammar. She did not think that she has a lot of literacy. She associated being literate with being smart because

> if you are smart you know what you are doing and you understand what you are reading.
>
> [sic]

Since Abigail did not view herself as a literate person, her weakness was not always understanding what she is reading. Therefore, she shied away from conversations that dealt with what she read or what she was supposed to read. Even though she had this negative view of herself as a literate being, Abigail did participate in a wide range of literate behaviors.

> Teachers tell me to find articles that I enjoy in magazines, since that is still reading. If I enjoy the magazine, I get the bits and pieces, then that's still reading. Magazines are easy to read. There are more short stories, chapter books are hard to read for me. [sic]

Engaging within texts that she saw as not as difficult as academic reading still allowed Abigail to practice her literacy skills. By reading magazines, Abigail encountered varying text structures that were evident in the varying texts that an adult interacts with on a daily basis.

> The majority of reading I do is online, so I can do it anywhere. I like online don't feel rushed and I can read at a slow pace. [sic]

Interacting with the varying text structures in the online world, showed that Abigail was strengthening her 21st century literacies to be a successful adult.

> I study by going back through the text book, I like to high light my books. It helps me because it shows me I know what I read and can understand. [sic]

Abigail used studying strategies to help her understand and comprehend the texts that she encounters. These skills helped to strengthen her life literacy skills, which in turn are allowing her to be a successful adult.

It is important to engage Abigail in activities that she sees as important to her as well as her need to feel important while she is doing that. By having Abigail engage in activities that do not show her literacy skills, the educational institution is continuing the idea that Abigail is not good at things.

> I would rather talk to my friends about life and stuff and not about school. Same thing in
>
> class. I hated writing as much as reading. [sic]

There is a need for Abigail to be engaged in activities that showcase her knowledge through a social aspect rather than traditional modes of expression. Abigail has the skills that show her literacy abilities even if she does not see them herself.

Emily- The Social Academic Reader

I have had the longest relationship with Emily. I first met Emily as a sophomore who was assigned to be on my caseload. She was also enrolled in my seminar. Emily was a contradiction in descriptions. She was feminine girl who like to go mudding in her jeep, play soccer and go hunting with her dad. She also made sure everyone in the group felt accepted and made sure no one was left out. When a group of students were playing *Scrabble*, she made sure that the quiet students were included as well.

Emily received special education services and supports as a student identified with a specific learning disability in Reading. On formal assessments, Emily scored in the average range in mathematics, but scored below average in reading and writing subtests. She received services through co-taught English classes and additional adult assistance to access the general

education curriculum in science classes. Even after high school, Emily received

accommodations and modifications through her post-secondary schooling by contacting the

students with disabilities services office.

Emily and I interacted with each other on a daily basis for three school years. Emily had

her own seat at my front table (that is what I had used as my desk) during seminar. She chose to

sit there so she could easily ask me questions for help in her homework. Like my relationship

with Thomas, my relationship with Emily was one of mentoring rather than teaching. She had

clear goals and objectives for her education and knew early what she wanted to do after high

school. We would talk about how she could best attack work that was assigned. We worked

together to learn about the topics in her Anatomy and Physiology class. It was through our

relationship, that Emily felt comfortable to talk to her other teachers when she would hit a

difficult topic or get stuck on an assignment.

Guess what? The military is moving us, again.

Emily entered the Sunflower School District as a sophomore. Prior to attending there, Emily lived in different states due to her family's involvement with the military.

Being part of an Army family can be tough with moving around about every three years and being the new person in school. Before my father joined the Army, we started out in Waterville Maine. After my father got back from basic training, he married my mother. When I turned one, it was off Fort Benning Georgia. We lived in Georgia until I was about 6 years old. I remember we had a huge playground behind our house with the woods in the background. The kids on our street would gather in the woods to the cave we were building. The day I met Jessica was a day I could never forget. [sic]

Emily's memories were connected to experiences that she had. This helped to strengthen her connections to those memories.

During recess, I was walking under the monkey bars when a snow boot hit me in the head. Let me remind you that we were in Georgia during the summer. This girl jumps down and grabs her snow boot. After that, we became best friends no one could stand in our way. After school let out my baby sitter was picking Jessica and me up together. I was so excited when I found she lives two houses down from me. Soon after that, her family and my family became friends.

Emily was able to have a strong family bond as well as strong friendships that allowed her to find stability in the changing world of moving.

A year later Jessica's father got orders to move to Fort Carson Colorado with short notices. My father comes home later that day with orders move to Fort Carson in a month. Jessica's family left before us and bought a house just outside Fort Carson. The

117

waiting list for housing on Fort Carson was a four-month wait. They invited us to stay

with them until we were able to get on post. Fort Carson was my favorite place to live. I

enjoyed having the mountains in my back yard with all the wildlife to see. [sic]

Emily was also subject to the permanent duty station changes (PCS) that many in military

families encounter. These moves helped to create a vast knowledge base that helped enhance her

life literacy skills.

 During my fifth grade year, we could not have recess outside because two baby black

bears wanted to play that day. Jessica did not go to the same school as me because the

distance. Our families got together every weekend at her uncle's farm. We would always

get into trouble for running after the chicken and goats. I believed I enjoyed Colorado

because there was always something for the family to do. We would take trips to the top

of the mountains and walking the trails.

After four years in Colorado, we were heading back to Fort Benning. I finished

my middle school year at Faith Middle School on post. Faith Middle School had dress

uniforms where we wear collared shirts and brown dress pants. I started being a good

student in middle school when I found out they posted pictures of the students that had

As and Bs. I was on that picture board all three years I was at Faith Middle School.

She was able to attribute the structure that this school had to allow for her be successful in

school. It was once the structure of school was gone, her ability to assimilate in a new school

structure became difficult.

When high school hit, we were on the move again to Fort Riley Kansas. I did not like

Kansas at first because as I got older I started to hate moving. I believe moving around

with the Army has made me a better person with making new friends and opening up. I

huge problem I had with moving around was changing schools. Each school had their

own way of teaching and how much time them with it. The first high school I went to

only had four classes for half the school year. The second high school I went to had eight

classes for half the year then different classes. [sic]

It was evident that Emily had a positive identification with her parents throughout her

school age years; this is still true today as an adult. Even though Emily moved from place to

place, she was able to have positive experiences in each school that she was at. She saw school

as a place where she was supported and able to succeed. She saw herself being able to talk to her

teachers as well as ask for help when she needed it. Her parents were a big support for her for

both her school endeavors and her activities.

My parents love sports so they show a lot of respect for our sports. They are always there

for us (me and my two brothers) and they bribe us to get good grades. That helps me

since I have to pay for my car and gas money. [sic]

In high school, Emily was very active in girls' soccer and participated in the grade level

committees. These activities helped her to connect to the school, her friends, her interests and

her families' interests.

I know I can do this

It was not until middle school that Emily started to have difficulty with learning in school. She found reading to become more difficult for her as the text that she was reading was beginning to become more difficult and the concepts becoming more in-depth.

It was reading and understanding what I was supposed to grasp on to. The questions that were asked, I would think the answer was one thing and I was way off. [sic]

Emily's weaknesses in comprehension began to encroach on her success in school.

This made me feel like I wasn't good enough, like I couldn't do it, but I eventually got it. [sic]

Emily was aware of her learning difficulties but was able to get the appropriate services and support in school. It was in middle school that Emily was identified with a Specific Learning Disability in Reading and was put on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Even though she received services to help with her weaknesses in Reading, she did not want to let that stop her.

I wanted to get better because I would see all these people raise their hands to read and I was scared. I didn't want to mess up, have people laugh at me because I've seen other people get laughed at because they didn't read well. [sic]

Emily had a strong sense of who she is and what she wanted to accomplish and having a reading disability was not going to stop her. It is through this strong sense that Emily does not see her struggles as negative but that of challenges that she wants to overcome.

Emily received intervention thought a READ 180 class that helped strengthen her comprehension as well as getting help through tests being read aloud to her. Even though Emily had a strong desire to get better with her reading, she faced negativity from her peers.

In middle school, I would have to leave everyone to have the test read aloud to me. And

people though that I was cheating and I was like "No, I'm just get help so I can make

myself better". [sic]

Emily made sure that she took advantage of the accommodations and modification that were

allowed for her. She knew that theses supports were there to help her access the general

education curriculum regardless of what her non-identified peers thought.

I believe it was more of people pointing out that I have a harder time reading. So I

stepped away from read in classes. My senior year is when I stepped out and started

reading in class. When we would read a play, I wanted to have a big role so I could read.

I started to see that I was going to have to push through and not care what others think. If

I did not know how say a word I would stop and ask how to say it. I started learning soon

enough big words didn't scare me. [sic]

Emily never shied away from a challenge. Emily had enrolled in an Anatomy and Physiology

class her senior year of high school. It was in that class that she had encountered medical

terminology as well as advanced texts that challenged her abilities. She made sure that she

advocated for herself as well as focused her attention to the class's content. Her persistence and

hardworking attitude helped her to pass that class that foreshadowed her post-secondary

aspirations. It was those challenges that have shaped her to be the literate person that she is.

This is how I read and write

Emily was ambiguous with the definition of literacy. She primarily defined this as being

able to read and write. She saw that there was a difference between being able to read and write.

In elementary school, she saw literacy as being easy since she saw success in her abilities. As

the content became harder for her to comprehend so did her abilities to be a literate person. Characteristics that Emily saw herself as possessing in the area of literacy were that

Just to be creative, I know I have to read a book; I need to be into it. Hopefully the cover catches my attention. [sic]

Emily demonstrated her literacy abilities by creating meaning from not only the books that she read but as well as the illustrations that accompanied the text.

Like I can see myself being a literate person when I write about other people's stories when I have to write paragraphs about them. I bring them to life too. [sic]

She was also able to provide meaning to her written work. The ability to publish even to her peers and teachers strengthened her literacy skills.

If you are a literate person you can be your own publisher, I mean writer. Like for the newspapers and magazine, I would love to have that. [sic]

Also if you are literate you can have any job, like a doctor or a medicine person because you can read and write about medicine. You can do anything if you can read or write. [sic]

Not only does Emily put a strong emphasis on successful reading but as well the need to be proficient in writing to be considered a literate being.

Emily interacts with literacy on a daily basis as she pursued becoming Registered Nurse (RN). She had to be proficient in her abilities to be able to be successful in college.

A typical day for me in class is having the teacher go over power points over a couple of chapters and going into the labs to apply what we learned. After class I read the chapters and take notes on the key terms and topic questions. I make flash cards and have my family quiz me on them. [sic]

Through her course work she had to navigate the medical terminology that was expected to be learned. This was a challenge for her. She was able to overcome this challenge by utilizing her resources and by using an application on her IPad to help with the pronunciation and helped her to visualize the procedures that she needed to know.

> When I started college they had a MLA style of writing that was done for the whole school. Different then what I learned in high school. I decided to take an extra class to learn the basics. So far in college I had to write research papers and observation persons. I really like the observation papers because I get to express myself and what I have learned during my classes. [sic]

Emily was able to be self-reflective and knew that she needed to strengthen her literacy skills. Advocating for herself shows that she has strong life literacies that will help her to be successful in her future.

> I am taking nursing classes. This month we are in the hospital with children. I get support from my teachers with any question I have or if I just, need someone to talk with. My books are all located on my E-book on my iPad. I do not like the idea because my best learning style is having a book in my hand. The Ipad started growing on me after I started learning that I can highlight and more notes to the side. I love that I can look up a word and it shows what chapter and page number. I like classes that are more than just taking notes. But learning who you are as person. [sic]

Emily is aware of her learning styles and uses them to tackle the difficult classes she has enrolled in.

> By being able to effectively comprehend the information that she is given, Emily is able to enjoy reading and looks at it as a social activity.

I like to read in class and even on my free time. When I have to read in class I take my

time and when I come to a word that I cannot pronounce I ask for help. [sic]

She prefers to read books that catch her attention through an exciting cover or by

recommendations from her friends. Reading for pleasure is something that Emily likes to do.

My mother got me to read <u>Fifty Shades of Grey.</u> I choose this book because all my

friends have read it and I wanted to know what all the fuss was about. Finding that page

turning book that you can picture in your mind is a time for me to relax from school.

Reading in class allows me to be able to ask questions so I can have a better

understanding of the material at hand. [sic]

Emily also uses social media to keep in touch with her friends, through Facebook. She

communicates with her friends though text messages and emails. These all show her level of

being a literate being.

CHAPTER 5 - Analysis of the Lived Experiences

In the previous chapter, the three secondary special education students' lived experiences were described. In this chapter, I utilize Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to describe the emergent themes that have developed.   The research conducted explored the secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings. Three secondary special education students participated in this research.

The initial coding of the interviews allowed me to examine semantic content and language the students used as an exploratory level (Smith et al., 2009). This second step of the IPA process allowed me to become more familiar with lived experiences of each participant and begin to look at "the language that they use, thinking about the context of their concerns (their lived world), and identify more abstract concepts which can help you make sense of the patterns of meanings in their account" (Smith, et. al., 2009, p. 83). Each participant did reply and provided email addresses to continue correspondence with me. Since the participants' graduations, we also communicated through social media (Facebook, email and texting). The varied way that the participants lived experiences were collected allowed me to use the authentic voice of a young adult for this study.

 It is through these responses that I have used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to describe the students' perceptions in relationship to their identification of being a literate being. The third step in IPA (Smith et al., 2010) is the researcher's ability to identify emergent themes that have developed through the interviews. Once the researcher is able to identify a set of themes, the next step is to identify how the themes across participants fit together. Through this phase, abstraction (identifying patterns between emergent themes and developing a sense of what can be called a super-ordinate theme) (Smith et al., 2010, p. 96);

polarization (looking at the oppositional relationships between themes); contextualization (looking at the connections between emergent themes); function (the function that themes take within the interviews); numeration (the frequency with which a theme is supported) all allow the researcher to make connections between the interviews.

This study explores the student perceptions as literate beings in conjunction with the current definition of literacy and a literate being. Literacy is defined as a lifelong and social continuum of skills characterized by one's ability to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms (NCTE, 2008). A literate being is defined by NCTE (2008) as a person who understands what literacy is, having the ability to demonstrate literacy through different modes of communication, and using literacy to navigate through his or her life world. It is with this understanding that three themes emerged through the research.

1. Students' stability and instability of their lived experiences influenced their literacy practices.

2. Being identified as special education students did not prevent them from being literate.

3. Different lived experiences led to different life literacy skills.

It is through these themes that understanding of these lived experiences can take place. These themes address the need for this population's voice to be heard in the literature.

Not only stability but instability of lived experiences influenced their literacy practices.

Through the abstraction of the data, these concepts of stability and instability emerged, see Table 5.1. It is through these experiences that their literacy practices were influenced.

Table 5.1 Students' stability and/or instability

		Thomas The Computer Savvy Talker	Abigail The Shy Tomboy Reluctant Reader	Emily The Social Academic Reader
Stability	Family Structure Environment		X	X
	School Structure DODEA	X	X	X
Instability	Unstable Family Structure and Environment	X		
	Moving with the Military	X	X	X
	Living on their own	X	X	

Thomas, Abigail and Emily come from similar yet different backgrounds. Their

perceptions of themselves as literate beings are shaped by their backgrounds. The stability or

instability that they went through during their academic career has also shaped their perceptions.

The stability that students find in school may be the one place that is in order in their lives

(Rumberger, 2003). However, what is important is even though there was instability in their

schooling such as moving to different schools with different requirements, these students were

able to find some stability in it.

Through the abstraction process, it is evident that Emily and Abigail came from the

traditional family structure of both biological parents still married to each other and their siblings

living together under the same roof, even though at times the families dealt with parents'

deployment due to the military. "A family structure change can be an emotionally stressful

event, involving changes in family routines, disruptive expectations about family life, and altered

relationships to key parents" (Heard, 2007, p. 436). Due to the fact that both Emily and Abigail have a strong family unit, these changes in the family structure were stressful but based on the support that the families received, the girls were able to be successful academically. Both girls spoke about the uncertainty and the amount of times their families moved because of the military.

Emily's family consists of two parents and two younger brothers. Emily is indicative of research done by Gutman and Eccles (2007), where she benefits from the positive identification with her parents, which allows her to use her upbringing to explore her own identity.

My parents love sports so they show a lot of respect for our sports. They are

always there for us (me and my two brothers) and they bribe us to get good

grades. That helps me since I have to pay for my car and gas money. [sic]

Abigail has her two parents and an older brother. Abigail spoke of the support that she received and continues to receive from her parents,

I have a really good relationship with my family. Even though my mom and I

butt heads. I always know I can go to them any time I struggle in Life. I always

rely on my dad to fix my stuff that is broken. [sic]

The wonderful relations that she has with her family, helped her to establish herself as an autonomous being but also allowed her to maintain positive interactions with her parents and to understand her role in her family structure (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Both girls have been able to know that their parents have and will continue to support them in their future endeavors.

Thomas, on the other hand through the analysis process of polarization, came from a unstable family. Divorce happened early in his life and his experiences with extended family have shaped him. Children are especially vulnerable to family transitions such as parent

separation or marriage; their recognition that the transition is caused by people on whom they depend for protection contributes to heightened vulnerability and anxiety (Heard, 2007). Thomas was the oldest of a number of biological and later step siblings. Thomas also had the experience of choosing to live with step parents. These events that happened in his life forced Thomas to seek stability in people that he knew that he could count on. One such person was his grandfather,

> My grandfather always said something about "Hold Fast" well I didn't understand
>
> that meaning until I was older. The meaning is "I dig in but I stand my ground." [sic]

With Thomas' family environment being in flux, he was able to experience independence outside the home, thanks to his grandfather's wisdom (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flananagan & Mac Ivers, 1993). This increase in independence saw that his relationships were more symmetrical in terms of his interpersonal power and authority. Thomas possesses skill that would identify him as a resilient student. Bonnie Benard (1997) discusses resilience as the human capacity of all individuals to transform and change, no matter what their risk. Thomas exemplifies this notion. He was a product of a divorced family, lived in poverty and dealt with the addictions of parents. Thomas was able to show the "Resilience skills of the ability to form relationships (social competence), to problem solve (metacognition), to develop a sense of identity (autonomy), and to plan and hope (a sense of purpose and future) (Benard, 1997, p. 2). Thomas could have been the student who did not beat the odds but he was successful. His ability to seek out friends, family and teachers to create stability in his life were to his benefit. Because of those people supporting him, he was able to have a strong perception of himself and be a success.

Not only does one's family structure impact one's perception of themselves and their stability but one's social group also has an impact. For Thomas, his friends were his family. They were the constants in his life even though his home life was marked with divorce, addiction and poverty. This exposure to a broader range of unfortunate environments through his extended family and friends' families, allowed Thomas to increase his cognitive maturity, led him to integrate and coordinate diverse social perspectives, and to evaluate his interpersonal relationships (Eccles et al., 1993). This is why Thomas felt more comfortable interacting with the adults at school instead of his peers when he transferred from school to school.

Emily had vivid memories of her friends early on in her academic career. Those friendships allowed her to exert her confidence that her family structure also instilled in her. She was a social being who connected with her peers in school activities and sports as well as connecting with her family in their interests.

Abigail spoke about worrying about her social status. She is a quiet student who is reluctant to search out those who are different than her. Throughout her academic career she did worry about friends because her family moved around a lot

> that I was really worried that I would not know any one since all my friends were back in Kansas. I actually did meet people that I knew back then, just because of being a military family. [sic]

The family structure and social circles that the three were a part of was helped to strengthen their perceptions of themselves, yet could be seen as stressors due to the instability that the students faced. In addition, all three were a part of the military lifestyle that can create instability in their lives.

The Department of Defense (DoDEA, 2009) and the Department of Education work collaboratively to ensure that there is an ease in the transition of military students who attend schools in local agencies. Through this, not only do the Department of Defense Educational Authority (DoDEA) provide resources to support local schools but assist with providing quality education for all military students. The Sunflower School District was a part of such collaboration. The DoDEA also help families to pinpoint schools within local agencies to ensure that specialized services are available for students with significant educational and environmental needs. Abigail, Emily, and Thomas as well as their families benefited from these services.

Titus (2007) has identified that military families spend on average three years at one military post before they are reassigned. "High student mobility is associated with lower academic achievement for transient students, and a high mobile student population creates stresses in classrooms and in schools" (Titus, 2007, p. 90). The moves that Abigail has made with her family because of the military serve as a stressor for her and may be seen in her school engagement (Heard, 2007). Abigail accounted for at least six moves during her academic career as well as repeating kindergarten. Emily spoke of five such moves. Thomas had more than he wanted to discuss, which destroyed his childhood according to Thomas. These moves created instability for each because each new school that they attended came with new rules, requirements, peers and teachers. For these students and their perceptions of themselves as learners these moves also created instability because they knew that it would be more difficult for them to pick up on the new concepts and routines that were being taught and used in the classrooms. Each classroom that they entered had different procedures, different class structures as well as different state standards that they were required to understand and succeed at. Not

only were the participants getting used to their new living environments but they had to figure out their new school environments.

Sanderson (2003) explored challenges that are faced with mobile students in that new students bring their educational histories and a knowledge of subject matter that do not always match with the shared experiences of the classes that they join. Thomas spoke specifically to this idea:

The moving around affected me a lot because I would get settled in and get the understanding of a teacher and how things should be done and then get told we were moving. This caused me to be less motivated and find ways to just get by in school. [sic]

Emily also addresses this by stating, "A huge problem I had with moving around was changing schools. Each school had their own way of teaching and how much time with it."

Abigail, too, spoke specifically on this

Moving around while being in school was always hard because each school was always different and a lot of the time they were ahead of what I learned. When they were ahead in whatever the class was, I had to work harder in class then everyone else and I struggled in school as it is, but I did the best I could to get caught up in class to be normal like the rest of the class. The hardest thing was trying to get caught up with the rest of the class when I moved and having the teacher understand I struggled in some parts. But the easiest thing was I could always have a fresh start when I went to a new place. [sic]

The aspects of the students' family structure and the frequency of the family moving has impacted their educational lives. These students have faced challenges that allowed them to grow in to the people they are today. By recognizing the instability in their lives when they were growing up, allowed them to find stability after high school.

Being identified as special education students did not prevent

them from being literate.

Even though from the onset, a student's special education background was a priority for

inclusion in this study, the participants had distinct perceptions of being identified as needing

special education supports and services and how that impacted their literacy practices. From the

abstraction of the data, the following concepts were identified in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Special Education Services

	Thomas	Abigail	Emily
Eligibility Services and Supports	Specific Learning Disability in Reading	Other Health Impairment: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Specific Learning Disability in Reading
Accommodations	X	X	X
Modifications	X	X	X
Support from teachers	X		X
Didn't want to be seen as different	X	X	X
Desire for Achievement	X		X

Table 5.3 Literacy Practices

		Thomas	Abigail	Emily
Literacy Practices	Perceptions of being Literate	It is an everyday experience and having what you need to be successful.	It is the ability to know English and the stuff in English class, like grammar.	The ability to read and write.
	Academic Reading			X
	Functional Reading	X	X	X
	Social/Pleasure reading	X	X	X
	New Literacies	X	X	X

Despite each student's receiving special education services, they are being literate. Each student has had distinct recollections of when learning became difficult for them. Thomas remembers mixing up numbers and letters early on in school:

What happen was I couldn't read properly and print the words the correct way on the paper.   What my Brain would do is flip the words and letters. (Example Apple > elppA.) It didn't affect me until I had an issue with Geometry and Trig. [sic]

But Thomas masked that by goofing off with his friends and not really paying attention in class. He did not want his disability to be used as a shield and he was able to graduate high school early.

 Emily realized in middle school that she started to have difficulties reading and understanding what she was reading.

This made me feel like I wasn't good enough, like I couldn't do it, but I eventually got it. [sic]

Abigail remembered in fourth grade that things were different for her

Reading is something that is hard for me, especially understanding what I read. And

sometimes getting left behind when everyone else reads faster. [sic]

Research has suggested that the early adolescent years mark the beginning of a

downward spiral for some students. This spiral may lead some students to academic failure and

school dropout (Eccles et al., 1993). This did not happen to these three participants. The reasons

that these students were successful can be traced back to the effective special education services

that they received, the appropriate accommodations and modifications that were provided,

having teachers that believed in them as well as having the perseverance, determination and

volition not to let their disability stand in the way of their success.

All three of the participants, remarked about learning difficulties early in their education

careers. Those difficulties were severe enough to warrant special education testing and

subsequently, the three were identified to receive special education supports and services.

Thomas and Emily were identified as having specific learning disabilities in reading and Abigail

as a student with an Other Health Impairment due to ADHD impacting her acquisition of general

education curriculum.

These exceptionality labels enabled all three to receive accommodations to help level the

playing field for them (Wormeli, 2006), whereas modifications alter the curriculum expectations.

Accommodations tend to be more universal and less invasive to one's perception of themselves.

Some of the accommodations that the participants received were alternative location to take tests,

having tests read aloud to them, additional adult assistance, reduced test question to still assess

essential elements of instruction.

Emily- In Middle School, I would have to leave to have the test read aloud to me.

And people thought I was cheating and I was like "No, I'm just getting

help so I can make myself better".

Abigail- In elementary school, it seemed like I was the only one who needed help.

I always had a para next to me. I knew I needed help, and that they were there to help

me, it never really bothered me.

Thomas- Having accommodation and modifications doesn't make me feel like

I'm rushing through it. Say I got 300 questions for a test and I can take

my time and not rush through it. So I don't get a failing grade.

Thomas also said that he was not letting his disability be a shield and he has forcefully broken it. These accommodations helped these students to do their best in spite of their disabilities. Fletcher et al., (2006) discussed the effects of accommodations for students with learning disabilities. They addressed in their research the effectiveness of extended time, oral presentation of the material, students reading aloud passages, and how they affect high stakes testing. Accommodations that are necessary for high stakes testing, should be accommodations that are used on a daily basis. Fletcher et al., (2006) also addressed the need that the accommodations should be disability specific. The accommodations that the three received were specific to their disabilities impacting on their ability to read and effectively comprehend grade level curriculum.

All three participants were aware of the accommodations that were a part of their IEP's and had the ability to advocate for themselves, if the accommodations were not in place. At times in high school though, Thomas said,

I kept to myself a whole lot [sic]

Emily said,

I believe it was more of people pointing out that I have a harder time reading, so I

stepped away from reading in class [sic]

and Abigail said,

I was shy about asking for help on from of other students [sic]

A part of a person's self-concept is through comparisons with one's social group. These students

knew that they needed assistance but because of their fear of being judged by their friends

showed their reluctance to ask for assistance in front of their peer groups. Chapman (1988)

discussed that when low achieving students are judged in relation to higher achieving students,

feelings of inferiority, lack of motivation and interpersonal hostility can be viewed. Emily

persevered for her desire to become a better reader despite the negativity that she met from her

peers. It is to these students credit that they did not let this stand in their way.

On the other hand, only Emily and Abigail participated in curriculum modifications.

Abigail was in a reading intervention program that helped to strengthen her comprehension

skills. Thomas remembers being pulled out of class to have people help him with his reading

when it was identified that he was dyslexic. Emily received the most extensive of the curriculum

modifications. In middle school, Emily was

put in a class where we all needed help but there were certain people who need more

help, but I think I was one of them. The class was smaller and I had a teacher and a para.

The students in the class were of mixed ability and there were some behavior kids in

there too. [sic]

She was also a part of modified English classes at the secondary level as a freshman. Then the

remainder of her secondary schooling, Emily, like Abigail and Thomas, was in co-taught English

classes.

"Teachers do respond differently to various children in the same classroom depending on a variety of characteristics and people do perceive similar environments differently depending on their cognitive and motivational orientation" (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 96). All three did not want to be seen as different from their peers. To this, the participants were able to form relationships of teachers that they knew they could trust.

In Thomas' stories that he told, he spoke specifically of two teachers that impacted his perception of himself: Mrs. McNemar and Mrs. York.

> Mrs. McNemar made sure you understood things and not just saying oh yea, I get
>
> it etc. She really wanted you to learn how to operate and become top notch with
>
> the learning disability. If anything I feel she made me get a better grasp on
>
> learning curve of what should be done. [sic]\
>
> Miss York helped me gain a better understanding of what is needed for the
>
> assignments, she would break it down to simple steps and it would click. The
>
> best part I loved about the class how she taught it was, she would go through each
>
> chapter via PowerPoint and give class a more hangs on experience with learning
>
> the American history. [sic]

Emily and Abigail spoke more generally about the teacher support that they received throughout their academic career. Emily knew that she could go to any of her teachers with any question that she had or if she just needed to talk. Abigail also felt comfortable with some of her teachers to be willing to talk to receive the help that she was needing.

Some support that the students received on a day to day basis in the classroom, were also received during classroom, district and state assessments. Testing environments are reflective of the classroom routines. Critics have noted that high stakes testing has had an impact on the

138

perceptions of students taking the tests (Triplett & Barksdale, 2010). The participants were equal in their use of the accommodations available to them during these tests (Dennis, 2012). Thomas and Emily utilized a small group setting to take the tests and extended time to complete the assessments. Abigail utilized small group setting, extended time and the read aloud option to complete her state assessments. Since these students had numerous opportunities with their peers to complete formative testing with their peers (to see where they measured up prior to the official test), taking the official test was merely a formality. This additional preparation strengthened their skills to effectively complete the assessments (Hoffman & Nottis, 2008). Thomas and Emily met standards on the assessments and Abigail was below standards. All three did have growth from the formative data that was collected. The participants also knew that the scores that they received on state assessments did not define them as students. This was supported because neither Thomas, Abigail nor Emily used a number to describe themselves.

These students were able to understand what their disabilities were and did not let that stop them from achieving what they wanted to achieve. In doing so, Emily and Abigail made sure that they were able to receive accommodations in the post-secondary environment. Eckes and Ochoa (2005) discuss the differences that a student faces when transitioning from High School to Higher Education. Specifically, there is the responsibility for the individual with regards to seeking special education services. No longer is the school responsible for making the accommodations and modifications, but the student is required to seek out those services for themselves.

In order for any student to be successful in college, one must have a strong perception of themselves to advocate for themselves. Abigail and Emily did just that. Abigail had enrolled in classes that would help her strengthen her reading and writing skills in this post-secondary

139

environment. She had also contacted the school's Disabilities Services office in order to advocate for herself and receive accommodations that would help her to succeed in her classes of her major. In doing that, she made sure that her instructors were aware of those accommodations. "Once the university is on notice of the disability, the school must make 'academic adjustments' that are necessary to ensure an opportunity to participate. Such accommodations may include the following: tape recorded lectures, extended time for exams, or the substitution of courses" (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005 p. 9). Abigail did not meet any resistance from her instructors or her peers when she did that. She utilized tools on her iPad for scientific pronunciations, was allowed extended time to complete exams, spoke with instructors to get clarification of concepts that challenged her as well as utilized classmates to help her study.

Emily did similar things at her post-secondary environment. To assist her, she made sure she took the classes that would help her achieve the certification that she was working towards. She took the minimum number of credits a semester so she did not get overwhelmed and have ample time to complete her work in the classes she was enrolled in.

All three looked towards higher education when they finished high school. Abigail spent some time in a community college stetting to obtain a certification to work in her current job. Thomas also completed some community college but felt that while he was sitting in classes, he was not learning anything new. Today, Thomas and Abigail live on their own and are working in the job force in fields that interest them --Thomas in the Information Technology field in New York State. Abigail is working in early childhood education living in Kansas. Emily finished a technical school program to receive her licensed practical nurse. Emily continues to live with her family in Maine, working as an LPN and finishing course work to be a registered nurse. The

choices that they have made were because of the strong perceptions they had of themselves in order to succeed. As well, all three have exceed expectations to find stability in their lives.

Each student understood that their learning differences were hurtles and not road blocks toward their education. All three were able to advocate for themselves and persevere through challenges, thus strengthening their perceptions of themselves as literate beings.

Literacy Practices Impacting Perceptions of Being Literate

From the onset of the research, it was expected to see if these students understood what it meant to be literate and to see if they engaged in practices that would show their literacy. Being literate in today's society is much more complex than it was even twenty years ago. With those changes the NCTE (2008) has redefined what it means to be literate: a lifelong and social continuum of skills characterized by one's ability to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms. Each participant saw themselves as having some type of literacy but they did not think they were literate.

How am I Literate?

To begin, each participant was unsure if they were literate based on the NCTE (2008) definition of literacy. But through their stories, the participants all possessed the characteristics of a literate being. Emily primarily defined literacy as being able to read and write. For Thomas, being literate was an everyday experience and having what you need to be successful. Abigail saw it as being smart and that you understand what you are reading. Moje (2000) through her work used a definition from *The Literacy Dictionary:*

> Literacy is a minimal ability to read and write in a designated, as well as a mindset or
> way of thinking about the use of reading and writing in everyday life. It differs from

simple reading and writing in its assumption of an understanding of the appropriate use of

theses abilities within a print-based society. (p. 21)

In looking at this definition, the three participants were more accurate with their own

definitions of having literacy than they thought. Adolescent literacies have moved beyond the

traditional textbook basis for literacy definition (Bean & Readence, 2002). By conceptualizing

the literacies in adolescents' lives, a student is able to access materials that interest them. The

experiences that the participants identifies with in their own literacy show that education is about

changing society. By changing the way that they think and interact within the educational

structure helps them to contribute in their various literacy tools that will be able to change the

way that each contributes to society in a fair, democratic and ethical way (Moje, 2000).

Abigail, Emily and Thomas have a strong sense of coherence which is defined

> as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive enduring
>
> (though dynamic) feeling of confidence that the stimuli deriving from one's internal and
>
> external environment are structured, predictable, and explicable (comprehensibility); that
>
> resources are available to meet the demands posed by these stimuli (manageability); and
>
> that these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement
>
> (meaningfulness) (Idan & Margalit, 2012, p.136).

The participants' use of literacy (in the context of academic, functional, and

social/pleasure) also exhibit how literacy is a social construct that takes different shapes through

the nature of the context that they are using their literacy.

Experiences with Academic Literacy

All three of the participants were enrolled in co-taught English classes their Sophomore,

Junior and Senior years. Sophomore academic reading consisted of reading varying short story

authors, poetry, classic American novels and plays, as well as Julius Caesar. Junior English at the high school consisted of American Literature, from Native American folk tales to contemporary American authors and playwrights, as well as historical documents. Senior year comprised of British Literature and Shakespearean plays.

In order to be successful these participants need to navigate through the varying types of text for each genre of academic reading. Not only did they need to decode written American English but they needed to comprehend the types and styles of the authors. Keene (2007) explored the concept that students 'never truly understand' the topics they read about and rarely understand the content teachers lecture about in class. This can also be attributed to the idea of these students had not moved past the intermediate stage of literacy that Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) discussed. These students have developed "a cognitive endurance to maintain attention to more extended discourse, to monitor their own comprehension, and to use various fix-up procedures if comprehension is not occurring" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 44). The three participants spoke about needing to read and reread the pieces that were assigned to them as well as seek out the teachers for clarification of ideas in the pieces.

> If caring relationships are a critical aspect of student success….. and if caring
> relationships make the difference in how kids take up particular literacy practices that
> their teachers offer, then the youths who are being silenced or dismissed are at a
> disadvantage because either they are not part of a caring relationship, or they are engaged
> in misguided relationships that allow them to disappear rather than learn to claim a voice
> for themselves' (Moje, 2000, p. 77).

Abigail spoke to going back into the pieces that were assigned and highlighting: this allowed her to help with her understanding of the text. She also spoke to the notion of shying

143

away from in class discussion because there were times that she was not able to fully

comprehend the text to the level that her other classmates had or even to the level that the teacher

wanted. Emily, on the other hand, had the strong desire to be able to read and comprehend the

texts to the best of her ability. She was able to reflect on a time when she was a senior and that

in reading 'Macbeth' she wanted to be included in the presentation of that play for the class.

Thus, putting her front and center of her classmates highlighted her reading ability. She wanted

to show her peers that she would persevere and not worry about what they thought. Thomas

spoke directly about going to his teachers when something was unclear. He knew that he needed

their help to clarify his comprehension when he would reverse letters in his reading. He knew

that his teachers were there to help him succeed and their willingness to address classmates'

concerns about Thomas requiring assistance was beneficial in his success.

Not only were these students reading, but at times they needed to write in response to the

texts that they were interacting with. This being, as Wilhem and Smith (2006) explain, the

dominate mode of writing instruction is 'assign and assess" in secondary schools. This forces

students, regardless if they understand the content, to have to write on particular topics. In the

participants' definition of literacy they all speak on writing as well as reading. Though in their

stories, no one spoke of academic writing. Emily addressed writing and her desire to write like

you would in a newspaper or magazine. She also said that when she started college they had a

MLA style of writing that was done for the whole school. This she said was different from what

she was taught in high school.   Abigail stressed that she liked writing as much as reading, and

that was not at all. Thomas spoke more about the writing that he needed to do for his job, in the

IT world, as being technical in nature and concise for his customers. The typical writing that was

done in secondary school exposed the participants to extended writing but due to the nature of

their post-secondary schooling and work force experience the traditional essay does not help them.

Thriving with Functional Literacy

Hillerich (1976) has defined functional literacy as the training of adults to 'meet independently the reading and writing demands placed on them'. Currently, the phrase describes those approaches to literacy which stress the acquisition of appropriate verbal, cognitive, and computational skills to accomplish practical ends in culturally specific settings. Although also labelled *survival literacy* and *reductionist literacy* because of its emphasis on minimal levels of competency and the preparation of workers for jobs, functional literacy is defended by proponents as a way to help people negotiate successfully in their societies (Hillerich, 1976). These ideas have a great hold on those students who have reading disabilities in order to be successful adults. It is seen through the participants' stories that they do have the skills to be successful adults.

In order to function in society, one should be literate. Emily sees the functionality in literacy as being able to hold a job. The ability to read the text that is job required is key. Thomas sees the functional literacy in his employment. He is required to read technical manuals as well as be able to communicate with employers using technology specific vocabulary. Emily is required to interact with science terminology in her post-secondary classes to earn her RN. Abigail, too, interacts with domain specific vocabulary in her classes in child development. She has to interact with her employer and the children she is charged with at the local day care that she works at. By being able to have something of substance to contribute to conversations about content is a way that they see themselves as competent individuals outside of school in ways that

are not well aligned with school (Hinchman et al., 2003). It is through this recognition that the participants are literate beings.

It is through this recognition as well that one needs to know how to find information that is necessary for their success. Emily, Abigail and Thomas shared that they utilize the internet, newspapers and magazines to stay current with events in the world. By reading information in these condensed formats allows them to not feel rushed or overwhelmed by a large amount of text and reading to do. They have received instruction in high school on how to judge the accuracy and reliability of the sources that they find (Hinchmann et al., 2003). It is from this instruction that they were able to navigate successfully different texts that they encountered in school, at home and in their jobs, without focusing on their disabilities. They all have received support throughout their schooling to insure that they would be able to function successfully in the real world after high school. Their abilities to be literate beings has been strengthen by their own perceptions of themselves and the motivation that they carry with them for their success.

Active Engagement in Social Literacy

Reading for yourself is one of the many tenants that literacy has for one's self. The participants' literacy practices are tied to their technology, friends, and pop culture that carries them into the changing world of the 21st century. Hinchman et al., (2003) explore the way the older students are supported with their in- and out-of –school literacies by exploring the ideas that those who are literate are able to engage in literacies to make the world in which they read and write messages, directions, labels and songs and such in which they are able to be a fuller participant in today's society.   All three participants engage in literacy practices of their choosing out of school.

Emily shared that in order for her to be creative, she knows that she will have to read. The books that she chooses to read are those that catch her attention and allows her to be part of the story. Emily enjoys reading in her free time. This is something you would not think to her from a person with a reading disability. Emily is also someone, who takes the recommendations of others for books to read. That social aspect to have a common ground of discussion appears.

> My mother got me to read <u>Fifty Shades of Grey,</u> I choose this book because all
>
> Friends have read it and I wanted to know what all the fuss was about. [sic]

By exploring a book that had received notoriety for the content, and being able to converse not only with her mother but her friends, demonstrates Emily's ability to speak coherently and demonstrate her literacy (Moje, 2000). This allows her to be empowered to interact with the social group as they discuss a text, and takes out the academics of the experience.

Traditional types of literacy are also used for pleasure reading for Abigail and Thomas. Abigail has been encouraged to read shorter pieces that can be found in a magazine or the newspaper.

> Teachers tell me to find articles that I enjoy in magazines, since that is still
>
> reading. If I enjoy the magazine, I get the bits and pieces, then that's still reading.
>
> Magazine are easier to read. There are more short stories. [sic]

Ironically, her perception of easy reading may sometimes be difficult based on the topic and text structure of the articles.

Emily does not only interact with traditional modes of literacy, but she also utilizes social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and email. Moje et al., (2008) have found that based on research that "nearly 90 percent of United States teens ages twelve to seventeen are online Internet users, as half of these wired youth access the Internet on a daily basis (p. 126)." The

participants of this study are a part of that percentage. The new literacy skills that Emily

interacts with allow her to think differently as Burke (2007) describes in *"Teaching English*

Language Arts in a "Flat World." The world is no longer flat for these students. Like Emily,

Thomas and Abigail also use social media and the internet as a large part of their literacy

practices.

> Thomas: easy reading is Yahoo news, and anything on the internet. I use google
>
> when I need to find out something. The time I spend on the internet
>
> traveling from one link to another.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) discuss findings in the research that boys are more inclined to read

informational texts, magazine articles and newspaper articles. Boys, it is found, use electronic

texts and read texts that align with their hobbies and interests. Thomas fits this profile.

> Abigail: the majority of reading I do is on line, so I can do it anywhere. I don't
>
> have to feel rushed and I can read at a slow pace.

Sara B. Kajder (2007) outlines the different ways that students are reading and writing outside of

school. She identifies weblogs, fan fiction, wikis, video games, digital images pod casts and

social bookmarks as the reading and writing spaces students are engaging outside of school.

The use of the digital age forces the literacy practices of these students to evolve. No

longer are they just reading for pleasure's sake but they are honing their 21st century literacy

skills of information and communication skills; thinking and problem-solving skills; and

interpersonal and self-directional skills (Burke, 2007). By using these higher order thinking

skills, shows the strength of the literacy practices of the participants, whether they recognize it or

not.

Different lived experiences led to different life literacy skills

Each participate brought to the study specific lived experiences that have shaped their life literacy skills that have been able to be identified through abstraction and contextualized in Table 5.4 and Table 5.5.

Table 5.4 Lived experiences

			Thomas	Abigail	Emily
Lived Experiences	Deep	Resiliency from an unstable home that was impacted by poverty	X		
		Post-secondary schooling	X	X	X
		Employment	X	X	
		Living on own now	X	X	
	Shallow	Stable family structure		X	X
		Limited experiences		X	
		Living with parents now			X

Table 5.5 Life literacy skills

Life literacy skills	Thomas	Abigail	Emily
Technical literacy skills	▪ Computer operating systems	▪ Early childhood literacy	▪ Medical terminology
Functional literacy skills	▪ Paying rent ▪ Car payment ▪ Paying utilities ▪ Cellphone	▪ Paying rent ▪ Paying utilities ▪ Cellphone	▪ Car payment ▪ Cellphone
Social Literacy Skills	▪ Social media ▪ Texting	▪	▪ Social media ▪ Texting
College literacy skills	▪ Dropout	▪ Certification	▪ Certification ▪ Continuing to a four year degree

The lived experiences of the participants have shaped them to be the successful adults that they are today. It is through those experiences that they have shown their ability to be literate beings. The organization of these experiences can be grouped as deep (broad experiences that have many layers) experiences and shallow (limited experiences that have concrete expectations) experiences.

Thomas has had the most unstable experiences while growing up compared to Abigail and Emily that have been identified through polarization. These experiences required him to be able to stand on his own well before many of his peers were required to do so. He had the skills to be able to pay his bills (rent, car, utilities, and cell phone). He freely spoke about his need to be resilient not only for himself but for his siblings. Thomas has described the broken home that he has come from:

150

My mother couldn't afford the rent because of my step father would buy beer and

Marijuana. Most of the time we would have to cut back on food so we would only

eat 1 or 2 times a day [sic].

By taking care of his siblings and realizing that he did not know where his next meal was coming

from was indicative of his resilient survival skills because he knows how to live. This shows that

he has literacy for living. Appleman (2007) explains that one should not underestimate

adolescents. This literacy for life was strengthened by the lessons his grandfather taught him that

follow the quote by Maimodes, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to

fish and you feed him for a lifetime":

He taught me everything to know about living, taking care of family, how to be a

successful person in life. How to make $20 last a week. The small things in life that

counts/matters. [sic]

Thomas continues to value the wisdom that his grandfather has given him as it continues to

strengthen the literacy experiences that Thomas will face in the future.

It is through these lived experiences that Thomas has had, that he should have been a

statistic for dropping out of school. Thomas was a student who changed schools because of his

life circumstances and not because of the set mobility of the military moves like Abigail and

Emily. "Students with greater number of school changes before the 8th grade and early movers,

changers and leavers are significantly more likely to leave school between the 8th and 10th grade

than are nonmobile students" (Swanson & Scheider, 1999, p. 61). The skills that Thomas

acquired from his life circumstances strengthened his ability to have the knowledge of literacy to

survive. He took these experiences and built a foundation of resiliency and perseverance that

have strengthen his ability to take on difficult situation and succeed.

This is in contrast to the experiences of Abigail and Emily, who both grew up in families where their biological siblings and parents lived together under one roof. Neither Abigail nor Emily needed to worry about where their next meal was coming from or if rent was going to be paid. Both Abigail and Emily, lived on military installations with their parents growing up. Even though they moved frequently as military families, the family structure stayed intact.

> Abigail: Growing up I've moved many times my family and I lived in Georgia, Maryland, Florida, Oregon, Germany, and Kansas. Each place I lived was always an experience to remember because I knew it wouldn't last forever. I have a really good relationship with my family. Even though my mom and I butt heads. [sic].

> Emily: Being part of an Army family can be tough with moving around about every three years and being the new person in school. They (parents) are always there for us (me and my two brothers) and they bribe us to get good grades. [sic]

Abigail and Emily were able to have the stability of their family structure even though they had to change schools. Both girls spoke of experiences where they experienced frustration because of these moves. Eccles et al., (1993) discussed that students can have negative motivational consequences when students are in environments that do not fit well with a student's needs. Abigail referenced this idea by being placed in a classroom, in one of her schools, with students who had needs that were more severe and different then hers. Emily spoke more towards the impact that fellow students had on her and their perceptions of her learning disabilities, than the settings that she was placed in. Both Abigail and Emily knew that there was a need to be advocates for themselves. They did not let those experiences define them. Idan and Margalit (2012) found that in self rating of learning disabled students that girls reported higher levels of

academic self-efficacy than boys. It is through the experiences that Abigail and Emily have had that their literacy skills for life were strengthened.

It is expected that one would be literate when enrolling in college. It is evident that all three of the participants are literate beings since they have had the experience of post-secondary education. Thomas spent some time in community college in New York State, taking classes to get his Information Technology certification, but he dropped out. He saw that the practical experiences which he was receiving on the job were more beneficial to him than sitting in a classroom. Thomas brought with him prior knowledge to the technology specific classes, yet those classes did not hold his interest. Eckert (2008) addressed the changes in reading at the post-secondary level to stress that "interpretation is a higher skill, which implies it requires additional knowledge to assume an interpretive stance, it would seem more logical to argue that the reader should begin with more prior knowledge rather than with a deficiency of knowledge" (p.112). For Thomas there was a disconnect with the classroom reading and his lived experiences, yet his ability to be a literate being in the Information Technology discipline strengthens his perception as literate being.

Abigail, too, enrolled in the local community college to take classes to earn her Child Development Associate certification. Abigail saw that there was a difference in the reading that was required of her in post-secondary classes. She knew that based on her disability she would need similar accommodations that she received in high school to help her be successful (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2007).   The accommodations that were available allowed her to be able to complete her course work. Abigail also knew her limitations and only took one class at a time. She had employment at a child development center and information that

153

she was learning in her classes was able to be transferred. Being aware of the life literacies that she would need to interact with, only strengthened her ability to be a literate being.

Emily had enrolled in a technical college after finishing high school to pursue a degree in nursing. She knew that she had the literacy skills that were needed to complete her program. Her experiences with Anatomy and Physiology in high school helped to prepare her for some of the demands of the science specific classes. Like Abigail, she accessed disability services at her college in order to be able to have similar accommodations that she had in high school. Emily had transition planning in high school that focused her instruction in the Health and Human Services area. This transition was crucial for her positive postsecondary experience (NJCLD, 2007). She was able to utilize the practical experiences that were available to her in hospital settings, using technology to understand content taught and communicating with her instructors when information was unclear. These are all skills that strengthen her life literacies and allow her to exert herself with others as a literate being. This is similar to the findings of Pajare (1996) where he discusses that efficacy beliefs mediate the effects of skills or other self-beliefs on performances by influencing effort, persistence, and perseverance. Emily epitomizes these findings because she continues to advance her education in nursing at another post-secondary institution to achieve her Bachelor's degree in Nursing.

The lived experiences that the participants have had through high school have shaped their decisions as they moved towards adulthood. After graduating high school, each was faced with the logical next step. Enrolling in post-secondary education was only one of the pieces of that step. Abigail and Emily choose to go to school local in respect to their high school and were able to live at home. Abigail, though, once she finished her certification decided to move out on her own. This experience led her to utilize the functional literacy skills that she has acquired to

154

find a place to live and survive on her own. Abigail had learned to budget her finances to allow her pay check to last to the next pay period. Emily lived with her parents to finish her nursing program and has since moved to Maine with her family to finish her Bachelor's degree. Emily does have employment but the demands that her home life requires of her is limited in comparison to Thomas and Abigail. She is required to pay for her car (gas, upkeep and insurance) and her cellphone. Whereas Thomas and Abigail are independent of their family structure and need to pay for everything that they need to survive.   Thomas too, lives on his own in New York State. He had to venture on his own because he was not allowed to move with his step father's family when they moved with the military.

The most drastic difference in the life literacy skills of Thomas, Abigail and Emily are the areas that their post-secondary schooling and employment has taken them. Each has spent some time in post-secondary schooling but only Emily has continued to take the path of completing course work for her bachelor's degree. The levels of literacy skills required to address their areas of employment require different technical reading skills. Thomas is required to understand and comprehend varying computer operating languages. Abigail must have the ability to communicate to early childhood students in age appropriate language as well as adult communication. Emily is required to understand and comprehend medical terminology to communicate orally and written with doctors and patients that she treats. The demands that content specific/discipline literacy has placed on the participant's post-secondary employment and school have required the melding of literacy skills that have been taught to them. The literacy instruction in their content specific arenas has prepared them with the cognitive and social knowledge and skills necessary to participate fully in the discipline activities that they are

a part of competently and successfully (Draper, 2015). Thomas, Abigail and Emily continue to engage in disciplinary activities that are specific to their abilities and interest.

Summary

Through the use Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) three themes were able to be abstracted from the lived experiences of the participants: Students' instability or stability of their lived experiences influenced their literacy practices; being identified as special education students did not prevent them from being literate; and different lived experiences lead to different life literacy practices. Each participant has identified what it means to be literate as well as displayed effective life literacies to be successful despite their eligibility of special education services and supports.

CHAPTER 6 - Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the students in order to understand secondary special education students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings, using phenomenological methods and phenomenological framework. The perceptions from secondary special education students has been missing from the literature. Therefore, I wanted to find ways to explore their voices about their literacy practices to help them succeed in the 21st century. I have used phenomenology as a research methodology because school is a large part of a student's lived experience, and through phenomenology I was able to gain a small glimpse of the participants lived experiences in the classroom. The findings I discussed in Chapter 5 allowed me to understand secondary special education students' perceptions as literate beings, how they understood what it means to be literate, and how their lived experiences have shaped their perceptions of being literate.

The findings strengthened my understanding of these special education students' perceptions as well as provide insight into students' experiences, which will help to strengthen teaching and instruction in the general education and special education classrooms. Teaching is not a one-sided endeavor. Understanding the perceptions that secondary special education students have of themselves as literate beings help teachers to empower students in ways that are both meaningful and relevant to those they teach. The research questions have been addressed in Chapters 4 and 5, this section based on the findings from the data and the analysis, will focus on implications for education and policy makers.

A major goal of education is the successful academic performance of students during the years that they are in school. This success helps to shape their literacy skills, not only for the classroom but for their life outside of school, to meet the challenges of employment, higher

education, marriage, family and community life. "The acquisition of reading skills promotes better overall school performance. Reading is an essential skill that enables learners to acquire content knowledge that is need to succeed in every academic subject area" (Blanton & Blanton, 1994, p. 10). Reading is just one facet of the current definition of literacy.

Literacy is now defined as a lifelong and social continuum of skills characterized by one's ability to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms (NCTE, 2008). This then shapes a person's ability and understanding of what literacy is and is able to demonstrate literacy through different modes of communication and use literacy to navigate through his or her life world as a literate being (NCTE, 2008). These participants demonstrated skills that show that they are literate beings because of the lived experience that they shared.

A students' past school experience continue to shape his/her literacy identity. Alvermann (2001) has identified three ideas that create a student' reading identity: culture, identity and struggling reader. This study has added to those ideas. My participants bring with them a culture to the classroom that has been shaped by their lived experiences. These students have traveled the country and the world because family situation and military moves. Not only do they bring with them their experiences of different states and counties but they bring with them different lived experiences in different school structures.

"So-called struggling readers whose identities are marked by unsuccessful efforts at (or perhaps by resistance to) 'getting reading right" may have decidedly different perceptions of how agency and autonomy work from those of their teachers and other significant adults in their lives" (Alvermann, 2001, p. 678). Thomas, Abigail and Emily have strong perceptions of themselves as individuals regardless of their need for special education supports and services.

158

They each were aware that they had learning difficulties and were receptive to the interventions and supports that were afforded to them. Through those interventions as well as their own self-efficacy, these students have been able to successfully navigate through the education system and be contributing members of society by demonstrating their ability to be literate.

The third piece that Alvermann (2001) discusses with regards to a readers identity is that of being a struggling reader. Each of the participants have identified learning weaknesses in decoding, fluency and comprehension which can be seen as struggling in reading. These students did not let their exceptionalities to cloud their perceptions of themselves as literate beings. They did not turn their backs on school literacy because they had life literacies that helped them preserver through difficult tasks both in and out of the classroom.

Implications for Educators

If students are expected to be literate beings in the classroom and in life, it is crucial for educators to help foster their perceptions of themselves and their abilities as well as being aware of the lived experiences that students being to the classroom setting. Much is gained by listening to the experiences that students bring to the classroom regardless of their need for special education supports and services. The special education students' voice is a valid one to hear when a teacher is creating learning experiences in their classrooms. Teachers' beliefs on literacy need to be shaped that literacy is not just functional and academic but literacy skills are for life. There is the need to value the special education students as literate beings.

Understanding special education students as literate beings

At the onset of this study, I had assumed that the participants would have seen themselves as literate being since they were all being successful in high school. I had been their teacher as well as a mentor to them. I had known the varied texts that they were required to read (the 'great

works', Shakespeare, poetry, historical documents and the such), the activities that they were required to complete using paper and pencil as well as technology. I had seen them work through classes in other disciplines that required more effort than others. I had talked with them about their futures and saw that they were not letting their disabilities stand in their way. In doing those things, it is important for me as a researcher to demonstrate teacher reflexivity. I realized my initial subjectivity to the subjects because I knew them. In being able to accurate describe their lived experiences as it relates to their perceptions of themselves as literate being, I must focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect the data collection and analysis, I had to take myself out.

But ironically, these students did not see themselves as literate beings although they were practicing different literacy skills. The literacy skills that they did possess did not match the academic literacy skills that school is made of. Yet the literacy skills that they demonstrated are indicative of life literacy skills that need to be valued and fostered. Each student did recognize that a literate person is one that has the ability to read and write. They also demonstrated competencies in in 21st century literacies despite being identified needing special education supports and services. Therefore in turn, these three students are literate beings.

Based on the NCTE (2008) definition of literate being: A person who understands what literacy is and is able to demonstrate literacy through different modes of communication and use literacy to navigate through his or her life world; each participant has met that definition. It is also through these perceptions that we can gain a deeper insight to the participants understanding of being a literate being. They may have not realized it but they have shown through their lived experiences that have possessed the skills to show that they are literate beings.

Why did these students, with their lived experiences, not believe that they were literate beings? I have determined that because, first, each was identified with either a learning disability in reading or other health impairment that impacted their reading that they equated their struggles with reading to reflect them not being literate. Each participant discussed their struggles with reading and writing. These were struggles that less resilient students may have let them overcome them and continue to fail. But these students did not. They spoke of accommodations, modifications, support from family, friends and teachers that helped they overcome their weaknesses and demonstrate their ability to be liberate beings.

Secondly, it may also be because of the high mobility and the instability that the student felt because of the household moves that their families were required to make because of the military or because of financial struggles the families' encountered. Each move brought with it new schools that the students needed to get used to. As well as new teaching styles that the students needed to learn though. These moves also created frustrations for these students because then needed to play catch up within the curriculum. None of these students moved within the same state. They all moved to different states and even different countries that had different curriculum requirements for mastery. For students with learning difficulties this also played into their ability to receive the appropriate interventions for their disabilities. Even though interventions were provided, the outcome of skills may have failed to provide the student with the necessary intellectual tools to uncover reality that often is hidden through the language of power (Macedo, 2006). Abigail and Emily were fortunate that their learning difficulties were identified early in their educational careers that the federal mandates of an IEP had insured that at each school they were to receive the appropriate special education services and supports.

Even as Thomas, Abigail and Emily navigated through different curriculum and state standards, they demonstrated skills that show that they are literate beings.

Third, their lack of identifying themselves as literate beings can also be seen through the different lived experiences that the participants brought to their interviews. Thomas had the most to overcome in during his formative years of school. He had to worry about the well-being of his siblings as well as where he was going to get his next meal. The instability of his family structure and the family's poverty caused him to look at school as an escape and be the class clown. He knew he learned differently but he did not want that to be his shield. To compensate for his challenges he found and has continued to excel in computer technology, strengthen his outward perception that he is a literate being. Abigail and Emily had more stable living environments and the support of their parents but they were aware of the perceptions that others had of them when in school. They both knew that they needed to preserve and not allow others to dictate their abilities even though they did have challendges. All three had resiliency through their experiences that indicate that they have life literacy to succeed in their future.

Educators can learn a lot from these three students' experiences.

Valuing the varied experiences that students bring to classrooms

Thomas, Abigail and Emily come from similar yet different background, just like the many students that are sitting in the classroom of U.S.. It is through these backgrounds that help to shape their perceptions of themselves as being literate beings. The stability and/or instability that they went through during their academic career has also shaped their perceptions. The stability that students find in school may be the one place that is in order in their lives (Rumberger, 2003). Even though there was instability in their schooling, these students were able to find some stability in it. Educators must be aware of these experiences that students bring

to their classroom. It is these experiences that can help to foster, shape and enrich the classroom environments.

As a military child, one is forced to move often. Abigail and Emily spoke of moving multiple times during their formative school years. This forced then to not only try to assimilate in the new neighborhoods that they were living in but also had to assimilate in a new school. When one moves with the military, you are not necessarily moving within the same state. Therefore the school structure and state standards may be different from the schools that they have just come from. The DoDEA's Educational Partnership is devoted to assisting partnering schools and districts in providing a quality education for all military students (DoDEA, 2009). There is that support that a school district has to deal with the military child, and Military Life Consultants (MFLCs) are there to support issues that occur across the spectrum of military life and help service members and their families cope with deployments, separations, transitions and the integration of deployed parents back into family life (DoDEA, 2009). It is ones role as an educator to help student access these services. Moving for any students can be challenging but for a military child, a civilian may not understand their struggles. Yet, neither Abigail nor Emily spoke about utilizing these resources. Though their family structure has stayed intact, the instability that they felt in school created anxiety and frustrations within their new classes. These moves caused the girls to be able to use the life literacies that they brought with them to help them survive in the new school. Teacher should help to ease the transitions for any student new to their classroom. By creating a welcoming and inviting environment as well as acknowledge the new students' experiences can allow for a more smooth transition.

Thomas, on the other hand, dealt with the instability of his family structure as well as his living environments. He exhibited the functional literacy skills of being able to survive and be

163

successful despite the instability that he was exposed to. Thomas' instability caused him to exhibit disruptive behaviors to mask his home situation. The fact that Thomas made sure that he stayed in school to better his situation is admirable. "Education is a key factor in determining long-term economic success, and the association between family disruption and lower educational attainment raises the question of whether the sharp increase in family instability during the past two decades will have lasting negative consequences on the educational attainment of the next generation" (Astone & McLanahan, 1991, p. 309). Thomas' choices later in his school career, supported his desire to not let his instability define his future self but used it as a prior knowledge for his future life choices.

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, students with high mobility could find some stability in school. Students bring with them varied background experiences that now can be showcased by their proficiencies on these standards. Cronin (2014) welcomes the new standards, "the standards gods have realized that every teacher is, to some degree, responsible for literacy instruction (p. 46)." This shared literacy approach allows all teachers to define literacy to suit ones role, disciple, and the ownership of the aspects of literacy. As students background are not just allow for inclusion in an English class but that background can help to foster discussions and understanding in any of the other content areas that they attend. It is disciplinary understandings that support reading and learning with in content areas (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). The standards are not a curriculum but an avenue to teach students how to think in all content areas. Students who have high mobility are forced to change curriculums with each move that they make. But through the adoption of the CCSS, the thinking skills are being taught will be able to transcend whatever curriculum they are placed in. As well as the cyclical

nature of the standards, students at varying abilities are able to access and achieve the standards with scaffolding even if there is movement within the school year.

These students also bring with them different lived experiences that can help to shape the conversations in our classroom. No two students are alike. Teachers should take advantage of the students varied backgrounds, abilities and skills that are brought to the classroom. The thinking skills that are being taught in the different disciplines can be elaborated on by the lived experiences that students bring. Each student is at a different level with the life literacies that they possess and each lived experiences should be valued.

Capitalizing on students' self-efficacy and resilience to promote students' literacy

Each of the participants had been identified with need special education supports and services early on in their educational careers. "Generally, the form identity takes during adolescence is presumed to have a significant impact on later life (Kinney, 1993, p. 22)". These participants did not let their special education label define who they were in school. They were aware that they learned differently from their peers but it did not hinder them from engaging in literacy behaviors in and out of school.

In school, literacy behaviors can seem forced because of the social constructs of the education system. "Many older readers struggle because they have difficulty grasping the importance of school literacy and subject matter learning" (Hinchman et al., 2003, p. 305). This is only compounded by having learning difficulties. School literacy and subject matter learning may not be of interest to the students. Many students come to see themselves as competent individuals outside of school in ways that are not well aligned with school (Hichman et al., 2003). Therefore, teacher must be utilizing universal design of instruction to help foster differentiation and being more strategic on addressing student's weaknesses. The participants

did not let this mismatch struggle keep them away from their goals. They were advocates for themselves in making sure that the accommodations and modifications that were legally mandated for them were followed. Thomas, Abigail and Emily had teachers who were focused on what they were able to do rather than what their challenges were and made sure that they were meeting their educational needs. Teachers should attend to their own willingness to work to help to instill in students a sense of competence and self-worth. How a student perceives himself/herself as a read and a writer will affect how motivated he/she is to learn in their subject-area classes (Alvermann, 2002). Teachers need to take a genuine interest in all the students in their classrooms. Fostering positive relationships with ones students allows for more open dialogues within the school setting as well as helps to shape instruction by building on students strengths and supporting their weaknesses.

Respecting special education students' literacy skills on out of school literacy

Thomas, Abigail and Emily also exhibited out of school literacy despite being identified needing special education services and supports. Their out of school literacy practices were shaped by their necessity and their interests. Thomas and Emily spoke about using social media to communicate with friends as well as using it complete school work. All three used texting as a way to communicate with others. Being able to succinctly communicate with others is a skill that has been strengthened by technology. Each also spoke about reading for pleasure. Whether that reading was in print (books and magazines) or on line, their reading was focused on their interests. By having control of the type of reading that they choose to do, helped Thomas, Abigail and Emily be successful despite their learning difficulties thus strengthening their perceptions of themselves as literate beings.

Teachers and other students must shy away from the stereotypical notion that being identified as needing special education supports and services mean that one does not have literacy skills. Just because a students has a label does not mean that they are not literate. Special education students are able to demonstrate their literacy practices in creative ways not just paper and pencil tasks. The CCSS are for all students.

> The Common Core asks students to read stories and literature, as well as more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social studies. Students will be challenged and asked questions that push them to refer back to what they've read. This stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life (CCSS, http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/).

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the CCSS. By having that scaffolding in a general education classroom for all students, it is indicative of universal design of instruction that fosters success for all students that fosters student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse ways to express and display ones knowledge.

Paying attention to the personal dimensions of literacy practices
to meet the needs of the diverse learners

Each student that walks in a classroom brings with them varied experiences that shape their educational career. "Attention to the personal dimensions of literacy learning… is crucial because they are wholly enmeshed with individuals' commitment and effort" (Moje et al., 2000, p. 404). Those students who are not connected to the literacy in the classroom and in school are those that are marginalized. It is important that educators must find ways to include and value

the students' voice, to make students a part of the meaning-making community (Wilhelm, 2008). The current classroom climate may not be able to meet the needs of these student or address the demands of the diverse groups of students and communities that educators serve. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to help to shape the learning experiences to meet the diverse needs of their students. "Reading is too complex a process to refer simply as decoding alphabetic print and making meaning of text" (Alvermann, 2002, p. 190). By tying in a student's prior experiences can help to stretched classroom discussions, foster lifelong learners and increase students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings.

Having the ability to acknowledge the heavy hand literacy has had in building networks across time and space, in de-localizing and reframing one's social life, and in providing the ideas of literacy which are larger and large chunks of the social world are organized and connected (Brant & Clinton, 2009). The understanding that the struggling student in the classroom may not be the same student outside of the classroom. That student maybe dealing with poverty, divorce, deployment and even homelessness. That student may also be the student who is working long hours to help to support the family income. These experiences all show that students have a functional literacy as well as a literacy that allows them to survive outside of school. By bringing in these life literacies into the classroom may help to strengthen the students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings. Being literate is no longer being just able to read and write. The social continuum that literacy now encompasses is reflective of the lived experiences that students bring to the classroom.

Educators must be aware that there is now not a standardization of literacy practices. There is a need to value the multiple dimensions of literacy that now are included in CCSS.

Rather than focusing solely on the skills of reading and writing, the ELA/literacy standards highlight the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college, career, and life. The standards call for a staircase of increasing complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also outline a progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from what they read. (http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/)

The literacy practices of today's students transcend what is explicatively taught in the classroom. Educators need to be aware and encourage the critical thinking skills that students bring to their classrooms because of the diverse experiences that student bring with them. The literacy practices of any student should be encouraged in all the content areas, fostering an extension of learning that goes beyond the classroom walls. In addition, educators need to encourage that each student's lived experiences encourages them to develop their own literacy skills and practices for their world. These skills and practices move beyond the high stakes testing that is standardized and need to be recognized as such.

Allowing special education students to demonstrate their literacies in multiple ways

As I have found through my research, students identified literacy as the basic components of reading and writing. What students have neglected to identify are the competencies that one needs to have in understanding, creating and comprehending meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms (NCTE, 2008). They have not identified those skills but through their lived experiences they have demonstrated that they are literate beings despite being identified as needing special education services and

supports. The CCSS show a shift in a teacher's classroom instruction to help to allow students to understand that literacy is more than just reading and writing and strengthen their perceptions of themselves as literate beings.

The CCSS for English Language and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technology subjects outline the grade level expectations for students in the essential areas of literacy (Haager & Vaughn, 2013). It is through these grade level expectations that educators can collaborate and extend their instruction to allow for critical thinking and problem solving skills to emerge for both the identified and non-identified students in their classrooms.

In order to continue to facilitate a students' understanding of what it means to be a literate being, educators must develop their own understanding of what the standards entail and how to scaffold their instruction for all students in their classes. There needs to be collaboration between special education and general education educators to help provide the appropriate differentiated instruction that is required for their learners. By providing differentiated instruction it will help to minimize that gaps for students that may or may not be identified needing special education accommodations. This allows for all students to have access to the complex and rigorous standards that are now a part of an educator's mindset.

There is also the need to allow students multiple ways to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts that are taught. Adolescents rely on literacy in their identity development, using reading and writing to define themselves. Fostering more opportunities for discussion, choice, and real-world literacy practices to allow for demonstration of ones' literacy are key. "When students are not recognized for bringing valuable, multiple –literacy practices to school, they can become resistant to school-based literacy" (NCTE, 2007, p.3). Therefore it is an educator's job to value the lived experiences a student brings to their classroom, even if the educator thinks the

170

experience is insignificant. By valuing these experiences, richer literacy experiences can occur in one's classroom.

By fostering literacy experiences in one's classroom will allow for transference when it is time for assessments. Gone are the days (hopefully) of educators teaching to the tests.

> Two multi-state consortia, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), along with other non-commissioned groups, are developing computer-based tests to measure student mastery of the new standards through a combination of selected response questions, brief written responses, and performance tasks requiring students to compose short written texts, such as an essay or a speech, in response to readings (NCTE, 2013, p 2).

These new assessments require educators to create authentic assignments that allow their students to demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways on a daily basis. This also is not only the charge for English teachers. This comprehensive literacy requires that literacy skills are required to be taught across content disciplines and grade levels. A students' literacy skills are all educators charge.

Collaborating between general education and special education teachers to benefit all students

My exploration of the literature regarding Special Education made me reflect on the many students that I have taught over the years. In my classroom, I made sure that I listened to my students. I was aware of the varied backgrounds that these students brought with them.   This at times, did make it difficult to ensure that the rigor and relevance that where expected of them was there in spite of their learning differences.   It is also important to realize that these students, too, were aware of others perceptions of their learning abilities.

Educators must be aware of these students' perceptions of themselves as learners in their classroom. Due to the expectations of CCSS, more and more students identified as special education are sitting in the general education classroom. In an ideal world both a general education teacher and a special education teacher would be sharing the responsibilities of instructing the heterogeneous classroom. The expertise that both bring to the table, one of content and the other of accommodations will allow the student regardless of their ability an opportunity to access the general education curriculum. Unfortunately, some content area teachers do not see reading instruction as part of their jobs and appear to fight the suggestions and support from reading specialists and coaches (Kamil, 2003). In order to combat this resistance at the secondary level, schools should provide high quality, ongoing professional development in literacy (Kamil, 2003). School districts should also provide professional development in unpacking the CCSS to foster the understanding and transference of skills across content and grade levels. The CCSS allow for growth of a student's critical thinking and problem solving skills regardless of their label in order to be career or college ready.

Educating these students in relation to the CCSS as well as on their IEP goals requires a collaboration in the classroom. More students' IEP goals are being written with the CCSS in mind. It is through the specialized instruction that they are able to achieve to some level the grade level expectations that their peers have in relationship to the CCSS. School districts are taking this idea seriously. School districts are providing professional development on co-teaching strategies, universal design and understanding of the CCSS. It is through these initiatives that the special education student in include within the mainstream.

Providing an environment of high standards is a foundational goal of CCSS. It is through the universal design of instruction, appropriate accommodations and utilizing the appropriate

instructional technology, that all students can achieve proficiency and display the literacy skills that they need for their future endeavors.

Implications for Further Research

In this study, I offered a description of the lived experiences of three secondary special education students and how those lived experiences related to their perceptions of themselves as literate beings. By giving their voices a place of prominence in each description, I have allowed the participants' own words to tell their stories. In order to have a rich description of the lived experiences, I limited the study to three participants. This limitation only allowed for a small voice to be heard, but it is a mighty voice that is missing from the conversation. Important studies could build on the basis that has been set from this study, extending the descriptions and increasing the number of lived experiences offering additional understandings from other secondary special education students.

The researcher sees the need for further investigation on the lived experiences by students of different ethnicities, race, and gender. Due to the limited participants, only Caucasian students' lived experiences were shared. The perceptions of students of color could add to understanding of other students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings more globally. Reiteration of this study, collecting more lived experiences of secondary special education students, would offer further understanding of the lived experiences that impact ones understanding of being literate and their literacy practices.

Finally, the research sees great potential in replicating this study longitudinally. This study looked at the lived experiences of secondary special education students and the memories of their formative years, and the impact those experiences had on their perceptions. I am interested to see what the descriptions would be if data collection happened yearly starting when

a subject was in kindergarten. Not only gathering the subjects' perceptions but also interview teachers and parents to see how they would describe the literacy practices of the subject. Such findings could have significant implications for teachers as they strive to better instruct students in the changing dimensions of literacy in the future.

Literacy is the power that allows one to transcend their current life standing. By exploring one's perceptions of literacy allows for educators to help shape the literacy practices in the classroom to foster the power that students need to be successful members of society.

Evolution of the Researcher

When I first undertook this research I was a teacher at the high school. The participants were students I had interacted with on a daily basis for their last three years of high school. I was in the trenches educating these students and students like them. I had heard their stories and wanted to help them be successful. I was proud to see these three students graduate and walk across the stage to get their diplomas. I had read the scholarly works that spoke of student's perceptions of themselves and being literate beings but these particular students voices were not described in the literature. I knew that this was a valid voice to hear since it seemed that more and more students were being identified with different learning disabilities. In hearing these stories, I knew that highly mobile students faced the frustration of transferring schools and having to deal with curriculum changes that would impact their ability to graduate on time or even have to take different classes than they already had because of different state requirements.

Towards the end of my teaching at the high school, we (teachers) were beginning to incorporate the new Common Core State Standards in their lessons. I was one of the positive proponents in my school because I saw this as a way to level the playing field for those highly mobile students. The cyclical nature of the standards as well as the hopeful adoption from all

174

states on the standards, could help those highly mobile special education students. These standards incorporate the ideals of the NCTE (2008) definition of literacy and allow for students to have multiple experiences to be able to understand, create and comprehend meaning through the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms. It would be through these standards that students would be able to demonstrate their literacy as well as be able to perceive themselves as literate beings.

Ironically, in the middle of this study, I took a position in an elementary school on a military installation. Here I was at the opposite end of the educational continuum as well as at the beginning of learning based on the Common Core State Standards. Now, I am seeing student before they are identified needing special education supports and services. I am seeing students who have lived through two and three deployments of a parent as well as household moves of duty stations. I am seeing the effects of instability and lack of resources impacting even the earliest of education milestones. The understanding that I have gained through this study does allow me to be able to add to the knowledge base for other teachers.

It is through this study that I have learned from these students that educators should not dismiss students' lived experiences. The experiences that students bring to our classroom can only strengthen our instruction and enhance the discussions that happen in our classroom. It is also important to know that just because a student is identified as needing special education supports and services does not mean that they cannot be successful. These three students have amazed me with the choices that they have made to be success contributing members of society. They each have surpassed any expectations that I had of them. This study has also showed me that there is no one way to teach the critical thinking and problem solving skills that one needs as

175

an adult. It is the job of all educators to help to create students who are able to think critically and problem solve in the adult world.

Thomas today

Today, he works for the State of New York Department of Health in Information Technology Security and has his own business of computer repair business on the side. Thomas tried some community college after high school. But he found that he had the knowledge already in the computer sciences that his job was looking for, so he quit school.

> I closed the business, I got an offer with the NY state Department of health doing IT security. I couldn't keep up with the market, money was getting tight and my buddy was looking for an IT security Specialist.   I think what making me successful is being able to operate and maintain a network infrastructure with the basic knowledge of how to read and write. [sic]

Abigail Today

Today, Abigail is a one year old teacher at a local day care. She continues to pursue her education to get her Childhood Development Associate through classes at the local community college. With these activities, she continues to use literacy practices of reading to and enriching the language of her students as well as interacting in college classes on line. She spends time texting and emailing her friends that she has not seen in a while. Participating in blogs and on social media is another way that she is able to display her ability to be a literate being.

Emily today

The future is bright for Emily and she is taking advantage of the opportunities that she has in front of her.

I did move to Maine at the end of July. We had to build a room for me once we got home.

I am still looking for a job. I've been helping out around the house with yard work and

getting ready for the winter. I got my LPN degree at Brown Mackie College. I had a

college in Maine called Kaplan that will take about two years to get my BSN.

Summary

The data gathered through initial interviews, classroom observations, and follow up

interviews (paper, through email and social media) yield descriptions of the lived experiences of

three special education students as they demonstrate their ability to be literate beings. Three

themes emerged from the individual and composite descriptions of each participants: students'

instability versus or stability of their lived experiences influences their literacy practices; being

identified as a special education students did not prevent them from being literate; and different

lived experiences lead to different literacy practices. By placing each special education student's

words in each descriptions, the perceptions of each participants, with regards to their perceptions

of themselves as literate beings were in the foreground of this research.

The most important implication of this study is that educators must be aware of the varied

experiences that any student brings to their classroom and help to foster opportunities for

students to show their abilities to understand, create and comprehend through the variety of

socially contextual symbols in oral, written, digital and other forms, in creating lifelong learners.

References

Afflerbach, P. (2009). National Reading Conference Policy Brief: High Stakes Testing and

    Reading Assessment. *Journal of Literacy Research, 37(2),* 151-162. Downloaded by

    Kansas State Libraries on June 27, 2010.

Alberti, S. (2013). Making the Shifts. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 24-27

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2008). *Why the Crisis in Adolescent Literacy Demand a*

    National Response. Policy Brief, June 2008. Retrieved from

    www.all4ed.org/files/strivingBrief3_numbers_02.pdf

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2010). *The Federal Role in Confronting the Crisis in*

    Adolescent Literacy. Policy Brief, September 2010. Retrieved from

    http://www.all4ed.org/files/FedRoleConfrontingAdolLit.pdf

Alvermann, D.E. (2001). Reading adolescents' reading identities: Looking back to see

    ahead. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44(8),* 676-690

Alvermann, D. E. (2002). Effective literacy instruction for adolescents, *Journal of Literacy*

    Research, *34(2),* 189-208. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s5548430jlr3402_4

Alvermann, D. E. (2009). Reaching/teaching adolescents: Literacies with a history. In J. V.

    Hoffman & Y. M. Goodman (Eds.), Changing literacies for changing times: An historical

    perspective on the future of reading research, public policy & classroom practices (pp.

    98-107). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Alvermann, D.E. O'Brien, D.G., & Dillon, D.R. (1990). What teachers do when they say they're

    having discussions of content area reading assignments: A qualitative analysis. *Reading*

    Research Quarterly, 25, 296-322.

Anderson, S., Medrich, E., & Fowler, D. (2007). Which Achievement Gap?. *Phi Delta Kappan,*
     547-550.

 Anfara Jr., V. A.; Brown, K.M & Mangione, T.L. (2002). Qualitative Analysis on Stage:
     Making the Research Process More Public. *Educational Researcher*, *31 (7),* 28-38.

Astone, N.M & McLanahan, S.S. (1991). Family structure, parental practices and high school
     completion. *American Sociological Review. 56 (June),* 309-320.

Ayers, K. M. (2012). Reconciling ecological educational planning with access to the Common
     Core: Putting the car before the horse?: A response to Hunt and McDonnell. *Research
     and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities. 37(3),* 153-156.

Bailey, C. A. (2007). *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research, Second Edition.* Thousand Oaks.
     Pine Forge Press.

Baker, E. A. (2009). Multimedia Case-based Instruction in Literacy: Pedagogy, Effectiveness,
     and Perceptions. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia, 18*(3), 249-266.
     Chesapeake, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).

Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning.
     Educational Psychologist, 28(2), 117-148.

Bardine, B. (2010). Research to practice: "Teacher research: Getting started" retrieved from
     http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0200-20.html

Barry, A.L. (1997). High school reading programs revisited. *Journal of Adolescent
     And Adult Literacy, 40(7),* 524-531.

Bean, T. W. & Readence, J. E. (2002). Adolescent literacy: Charting a course for successful
     futures as life long learners. *Reading Research and Instruction, 41(3),* 203-210.

Beers, K. (2007). The Measure of Our Success. In. K. Beers, R. Probst & L. Reif (Eds).

Adolscent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice. Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann.

Benard, B. (1997). Turning it around for all youths: From risk to resilience. ERIC DIGEST, 126, 1-7.

Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2006). Reading next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2nd ed.).Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Blanton, L.P. & Blanton W.E. (1994) Providing reading instruction to mildly disabled students: Research into practice. In K.D. Wood & B. Algozzine (Eds.) *Teaching Reading To High Risk Learners, pp.* 9-48. Boston. Allyn and Bacon.

Bomer, R. & Maloch, B. (2011). Relating policy to research and practice: The Common Core Standards. *Language Arts, 89(1),* 38-43.

Brevig, L. (2006, March). Engaging in retrospective reflection. *The Reading Teacher, 59(6),* 522–530.

Bracey, G. W. (1999). The *Forgotten* 42%. *Phi Delta Kappan, 80(9),* 711-712

Brinckerhoff, L. & Banerjee, M. (2007) Misconceptions regarding accommodations on high-stakes test: Recommendations for preparing disability documentation for test takers with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice.,22(4),* 246-255.

Brocki, J. M. & Wearden, A.J. (2006) A critical evaluation of the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 21(1),* 87-108.

Bruce, A.M., Getch, Y.Q. & Ziomek-Daigle, J. (2009). Closing the gap: A group counseling approach to improve test performance of African-American students. *ASCA Professional School Counseling, 12(6),* 450-457.

Burke, J. (2007) Teaching English Language Arts in a "Flat" World. In K. Beers, R.E. Probust & L. Rief (Eds.), *Adolescent Literacy Turning Promise into Practice.* pp.149-165. Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann.

Cawelti, G. (2006). The side effects of NCLB. *Educational Leadership*, *64(3),* 64-68.

Cervetti, G. & Hiebert E. F. (2015) Knowledge, literacy, and the Common Core. *Language Arts, 92(4),* 256-268

Chapman, J.W. (1988). Learning disabled children's self-concepts. *Review of Educational Research, 58(3),* 34-371.

Christie, K. (2007). Making assessments more meaningful. *Phi Delta Kappan, 88(8),* 565-558.

Clark, C. (2007). Why is it important to involve parents in their children's literacy development-A brief research summary. *National Literacy Trust.*

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (1992). Communities for teacher research: Fringe or forefront. *American Journal of Education, 100,* 298-324.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (2009) *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the NextGeneration.* New York. Teachers College Press.

Common Core Standards Initiative. (2010). Common Core State Standards. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states

Common Core Standards Initiative. (2010). Key Shifts in English Language Arts. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. Third Edition.* Los Angeles. Sage Publication.

Corcoran, C.A. & Mamalakis, A. (2009). Fifth grade students' perceptions of reading

motivation techniques. *Reading Improvement, Fall,* 137-142.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five
Approaches (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cronin, M. K. (2014). The common core of literacy and literature. *English Journal, 103(4),* 46-
52.

Dandorth, S. Taff, S. & Ferguson, P.M. (2006). Place, Profession, and Program in the History of
Special Education Curriculum. In E.A. Brantilnger (Ed.). *Who Benefits from Special
Education? Remediating (fixing) other people's children.* 1-25. New *York*, NY:
Routledge.

Department of Defense Education Activity. (2009). *Annual Report: Teaching the children of
America's military families worldwide.* Retrieved from
http://www.dodea.edu/pubs/docs/dodeaAnnualReport-09.pdf

Dennis, D.V. (2012). Heterogeneity or homogeneity: What assessment data reveal about
struggling adolescent readers. *Journal of Literacy Research, 45(1),* 3-21.

Draper, R. J. (2015). Using the Common Core State Standards to support disciplinary literacies.
*Voices from the Middle, (*22)3, 58-62.

Duffy, M., Giordano, V.A., Farrell, J.B., Paneque, O.M., & Crump, G.B. (2008). No Child
Left Behind: Values and research issues in high-stakes assessments. *Counseling
And Values, 53,* 53-66.

Duursma, E., Augustyn, M., Zuckerman, B. (2008). Reading Aloud to Children: The Evidence.
Arch Dis Child, 93(7), 554-557.

Eccles, J.S., Midgley, C, Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C.M., Reuman, D., Flanangan, C., & Mac Iver,

 D. (1993). Development during adolscence: The impact of stage- environment fit on

your adolescents' experiences in schools and in families. *American Psychologist, (48.2),*
90-101.

Eckert, L.S. (2008). Bridging the pedagogical gap: Intersections between literary theory and

reading theories in secondary and postsecondary literacy instruction. *Journal of*

Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 52(2), 110-118.

Eckes, S. E. and Ochoa, T. (2005). Students with disabilities: Transitioning from high school to

higher education. *American Secondary Education, 33(3*), 6-20.

Fletcher, J.M, Francis, D.J., O'Malley, K., Copeland, K., Mehta, P., Caldwell, C.J., Kalinowski,

S., Young, V., & Vaughn, S. (2009). Effects of bundled accommodation package on

high-stakes testing for middle school students with reading disabilities.

Exceptional Child, 75(4), 447- 463.

Freire, P & Macedo D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* Massachusetts.

Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.

Fuchs, L.S, Seethaler, P.M., Fuchs, D., & Hamlett, C.L. (2008). Using curriculum-based

measurement to identify the 2% populations. *Journal of Disability Policy Study, 19(3),*

153- 161.

Giles, C., Wang, Y., Smith, J., and Johnson, D. (2013). "I'm no longer just teaching history."

Professional development for teaching Common Core State Standards for literacy in

social studies. *Middle School Journal, 44(3),* 34-43.

Guillemin, M., and L. Gillam. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity, and 'ethically important moments' in

research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 10(2),* 261-280.

Guthrie, J.T., & Metsala, J.L. (1999). Literacy in North America. In D.A. Wagner, R.L.

Venezky, & B.V. Street (Eds.) *Literacy: An international handbook (*pp. 381-384).

     Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Guthrie, J.T. (2000). Context for Engagement and Motivation in Reading. In M.L. Kamil, P.B.

     Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson & R. Barr (Eds.) *Handbook of reading research:. Volume III.*

     New York. Erlbaum.

Gutman, L.M & Eccles, J.S. (2007). Stage-environment fit during adolescence: Trajectories

     of family relations and adolescent outcomes. *Development Psychology, 43(2),* 522-537.

Haager, D. & Vaughn, S. (2013) .The Common Core State Standards and Reading:

     Interpretations and implications for elementary students with learning disabilities.

     Learning Disabilities Research, 28(1), 5-16

Hampton, N.Z. & Mason, E. (2003). Learning disabilities, gender, sources of efficacy, self-

     efficacy beliefs, and academic achievement in high school students. *Journal of School*

     Psychology, 41, 101-112.

Hansen, L.L., & Boody, R.M. (1998). Special education students' perceptions of their

     mainstreamed classes. *Education, 118,* 610-615.

Heard, H.E. (2007). Fathers, mothers, and family structures: Family trajectories, parent

     gender, and adolescent school. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 69(2),* 435-450.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Time and Being:* Translated John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson.*New*

     York. Harper & Row.

Heller, R. (2014). Teaching Reading in Content Areas. Retrieved from

     http://www.adlit.org/adlit_101/improving_literacy_instruction_in_your_school/teaching_

     reading_and_writing_content_areas/?theme=print

Herr, K. (1999). Unearthing the unspeakable: When teacher research and political agendas

collide. *Language Arts, 77(1),* 10-15. Retrieved from Research

Library. (Document ID: 44466777).

Heward, W.L. (1996). *Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education Fifth Edition.*
Columbus, Ohio. Merril.

Heubert, J.P & Hauser, R.M (1999). *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion and*
Graduation. Washington D.C. National Academy Press.

Hillerich, R.L. (1976). Towards an Assessable Definition of Literacy. *National Conference of*
Teachers of English. 50-55.

Hinchman, K. A., Alvermann, D.E., Boyd, F.B., Brozo, W.G. & Vacca, R.T. (Dec. 2003).
Supporting older students' in- and out-of-school literacy's. *Journal of Adolescent*
& Adult Literacy, 47(4), 304-310.

Hoffman, J. V., Assaf, L.C., & Paris, S.G. (2001). High-stakes testing in reading: Today in
Texas, tomorrow?. *The Reading Teacher, 54(5),* 482-492.

Hoffman, L.M & Nottis, K.E.K. (2008). Middle school student' perceptions of effective
motivation and preparation factors for high-stakes tests. *National Association of*
Secondary Principals. NASSP Bulletin, 92(3), 209-223.

Horn, C. (2003). High-stakes testing and students: Stopping or perpetuating a cycle of
failure. *Theory into Practice, 42(1),* 30-41.

Idan, O. & Margalit. M. (2012). Socioemotional self-perceptions, family, climate, and hopeful
thinking among students with learning disabilities and typically achieving students
from the same classes. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 47(2),* 136-152.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. (2004). Building the Legacy: IDEA
2004. Alignment with the No Child Left Behind Act. Retrieved from

http://www.ideapartnership.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1344

&oseppage=1

Jacobs, V.A. (2008). Adolescent literacy: Putting the crisis in context. *Harvard Educational Review, 78(1),* 7-39.

Kajder, S. B. (2007). Unleashing potential with emerging technologies. In K. Beers, R.E. Probust & L. Rief (Eds.), *Adolescent Literacy Turning Promise into Practice.* (pp.213-230). Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann.

Kamil, M.L. (2003). *Adolescents and Literacy: Reading for the 21st Century.* Report Commissioned by Alliance for Excellent Education.

Kansas Multi-Tiered System of Support. (2009). Retrieved from

http://www.kansasmtss.org/overview.htm

Kansas State Department of Education Report Card. (2009-2010), Retrieved from

http://svapp15586.ksde.org/rcard/building.aspx?org_no=D0475&bldg_no=7620Katsiyan nis

Kansas State Department of Education: English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. (2012). Retrieved from

http://community.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=5605

Kansas State Department of Education. (2014). Envisioning a New Model: An Update, Systems Accreditation in Kansas. Retrieved from

http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/TLA/Accreditation/Accreditation%20Model/ACCREDIT ATION%20UDPATE%20-%2010-14-2014.pdf

Kanu, Y., and Glor, M. (2006). 'Currere' to the rescure? Teachers as 'amateur intellectuals' in a knowledge society. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies,* 4(2),

101-122.

Keene, E.O. (2007). The Essence of Understanding. In K. Beers, R.E. Probst, and L. Reif (Eds)
Adolescent Literacy Turning Promise into Practice. Heineman. Portsmouth, N.H. (pp. 27-38).

Kinney, D. A. (1993). From nerds to normal: The recovery of identity among adolescents from middle school to high school. *Sociology of Education, 66(1),* 21-40.

Kim, J. (2010 in press). Understanding the Lived Experience of a Sioux Indian Male Adolescent: Toward the Pedagogy of Hermeneutical Phenomenology in Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* for publication.

Krathwohl, D.R. (1998) .*Methods of Educational and Social Science Research: An Integrated Approach.* New York. Longman.

Lackaye, T., Margalit, M., Ziv, O., & Ziman, T. (2006). Comparisons of self-efficacy, mood, effort, and hope between students with learning disabilities and their non-LD-matched peers. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 21(2),* 111-121.

Levering, B. (2006). Epistemological issues in phenomenological research: How authoritative are people's accounts of their own perceptions? *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 40(4), 451-462.*

Macedo, D. (2006). *Literacies of Power: What Americans are not allowed to know.* Boulder CO. Westview.

MacLean, M. S., & Mohr, M. (1999). Teacher-researchers at work. Berkeley, CA: The National Writing Project.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1989). *Designing Qualitative Research.* London. Sage Publications.

Marzano, R.J. (2004). *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement.*

Alexandria, Va. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McCray, A.D., Vaughn, S., & Neal, L.I. (2001). Not all students learn to read by third grade:

middle school students speak out about their reading disabilities. *The Journal of*

Special Education, 35(1), 17-30.

McNulty, R. J. & Gloecklet, L.C. (2011). *Fewer, Clearer, Higher Common Core State*

Standards: Implications for Students Receiving Special Education Services. From

International Center for Leadership in Education.

Meltzer, L., Reddy, R., Pollica, L.S., Roditi, B., Sayer, J., & Theokas, C. (2004). Positive

and negative self-perceptions: Is there a cyclical relationship between teachers'

and students' perceptions of effort, strategy use, and academic performance?

Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 19(1), 33-44.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945/2009). *Phenomenology of Perception.* New York. Routledge Classics.

Military Family Resource Center. (2009). *Profiles of the military community: 2009.*

Arlington VA.

Moje, E.B. (2000). "*All the Stories that We Have" Adolescents' Insight About Literacy and*

Learning in Secondary Schools. Newark, DE. International Reading Association.

Mojes, E. B., Dillion, D. R., & O'Brien, D. G. (2000). Reexamining the roles of the learner, the

Text, and the context in secondary literacy. *Journal of Educational Research, 93,* 165-

180.

Moje, E.B., Overby, M., Tysvaer, N., & Morris, K. (2008) The complex world of

adolescent literacy: myths, motivation and mysteries. *Harvard Educational Review,*

78(1), 107-154.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

National Assessment of Education Progress. (2005). The Nation's Report Card. Retrieved

September from http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_grade12_2005/s0201.asp

National Association of State Board of Education. (2006). *Reading at Risk: The State Response*

To the Crisis in Adolescent Literacy. The Report of the NASBE Study Group on Middle

and High School Literacy. Revised Edition.

National Commission on Academic Excellence. (1983). "A Nation At Risk" Retrieved from

http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html

National Council of Teachers of English. (2007). Adolescent Literacy A Policy Research Brief.

Retrieved from

http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEfiles/Resources/Magazine/Chron0907AdLitBrief.pdf

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). The NCTE Definition of 21st Century

Literacies. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentdefinition

National Council of Teachers of English. (2011). Standards for the Assessment of Reading and

Writing: Glossary of Assessment Terminology. Retrieved from

http://www.ncte.org/standards/assessmentstandards/glossary

National Council of Teachers of English. (2013). Implementation of the Common Core State

Standards A Policy Research Brief. Retrieved from

http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/CC/0231-

sep2013/CC0231Brief.pdf

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (2007). The Documentation Disconnect for

Students with Learning Disabilities: Improving Access to Postsecondary Disability

Services. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly, (30)4.* 265-274.

National Urban League. (2005). *Mobilizing Communities to Support the Literacy Development of Urban Youth: A Conceptual Framework and Strategic Planning Model.* Center for Resource Management.

Nichols, S. & Berliner D.C. (2008). "Testing the Joy Out of Learning. *Educational Leadership, 65(6),* 14-18.

No Child Left Behind. (2002). Retrieved from

https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbreference/reference.pdf

Ortlieb, E., Cramer, N., & Cheek Jr., E. (2007). The art of reading: Dramatizing literacy. *Reading Improvement, 44*, (3), 169-176.

Pajares, F. (1996). Self-Efficacy Beliefs in Academic Settings. *Review of Educational Research, 66(4),* 543-578. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170653

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. Retrieved March 13, 2015 from www.parcconline.org.

Pflaum, S.W., & Bishop, P.A. (2004). Student perceptions of reading engagement: learning from learners. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 48(3),* 202

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(2), 175-196.

Pinar, W. F, Reynolds, W.R., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P.M. (2008). *Understanding Curriculum.* New York. Peter Lang.

Public Law 107-110. (2002). Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/207.pdf

Risko, V., Roskos, K. & Vukelich. (2002). Prospective teachers' reflection: strategies, qualities, and perceptions in learning to teach reading. *Reading Research and Instruction, 41(2),* 149-172.

Rhodes, V. L. (2008). Learning on the go: Voices of highly mobile urban students. *Learning Inquiry. 2(2),* 113-125. Retrieved from

http://www.springerlink.com/content/en111645188q2022/

Ruddell, R. B. & Ruddell, M.R. (1995). *Teaching children to read and write: Becoming an influential teacher.* Needham Heights, MA. Allyn & Bacon.

Rumberger, R.W. (2003). The causes and consequences of student mobility. *The Journal of Negro Education, 72(1),* 6-21. Retrieved from

http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211287

Sanderson, D. R. (2003). Engaging highly transient students. *Education, 123(3),* 600-605.

Shanahan T. & Shanahan C. (2008). Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content Area Literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 78(1),* 40- 59.

Shavelson, R.J., Hubner, J.J., & Stanton, G.C. (1976). Self-Concept: Validation of Construct Interpretations. *Review of Educational Research, 46(3),* 407-441.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Retrieved from

www.SmarterBalanced.org

Smrekar, C.E. & Owens, D.E. (2003). "It's a way of life for us": High mobility and high achievement in Department of Defense schools. *The Journal of Negro Education, 72(1),* 165-177. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211300

Smith, D. W. (2008) Phenomenology. *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy.* Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/

Smith, F. (2004). *Understanding reading sixth edition.* Mahwah, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum
Associated.

Smith, J.A, Flowers, P & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory,
method and research.* Washington, D.C. Sage Publication.

Smith, LJ.L.M., Fien, H. & Paine, S.C. (2008). When mobility disrupts learning.
Educational Leardership. 65(7). 59-63. Retrieved from
http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/hww/results/results_single_ftPES.jhtml

Smith, M.W. & Wilhelm, J.D. (2002). *"Reading Don't Fix No Chevys" Literacy in the lives of
young men.* Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann.

Smith, M.W. & Wilhelm. J.D. (2006). *Going with the Flow: How to engage boys (and girls) in
their literacy learning.* Prtsmouth, NH. Heinemann.

Steinkuehler, C.A., Black, R.W., & Clinton, K.A. (2005). Researching literacy as tool,
place, and way of being. *Reading Research Quarterly, 40(1),* 7-12.

Swanson C.B & Schneider B. (1999). Students on the move: Residential and educational
mobility in American schools. *Sociology of Education, 72(1),* 54-67.

Tatum, A. (2005). *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the achievement gap.*
Portland, ME. Stenhouse.

Thurlow, M.L. & Johnson, D. R. (2000). High-stakes testing of students with disabilities.
Journal of Teacher Education, 51(4), 305-314.

Tierney, R.J., & Readence, J.E. (2000). *Reading strategies and practices: A compendium* (5th
ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Titus, D.N. (2007). Strategies and resources for enhancing the achievement of mobile

students. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin, 91(1),* 81-97.

Trickett, E.J., Leone, P.E., Fink, C. M., & Braaten, S.L. (1993). The perceived environment of special education classrooms for adolescents: A revision of the classroom environment scale. *Exceptional Children, 59(5*), 411-420.

Triplett, C.F. & Barksdale, M.A. (2009). Third through sixth graders' perceptions of high-stakes testing. *Journal of Literacy Research, 37(2),* 237-259. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15548430jlp3702_5

United States Department of Education. (2008). A Nation Accountable Twenty-five Years After A Nation at Risk. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/accountable/.

United States Department of Education. (2010) A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Retrieved from http://www2/ed/gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf

van Manen., M. (1982). Phenomenological pedagogy. *Curriculum Inquiry.* 12(3). 283-299.

van Manen, M. (1986). *The tone of teaching.* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experiences: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

van Manen, M., & Adams, C. (2009). The phenomenology of space in writing online. *Educational Philopsophy and Theory, Vol 41, No. 1* , 10-21.

Villa, R., Thousand, J., & Nevin, A. (2013). A guide to co-teaching: New lessons and strategies to facilitate student learning (3rd Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Weckstein, P. (2003). Accountability and student mobility under Title I of the No Child Left

    Behind Act. *Journal of Negro Education, 72(1),* 117-125. Retrieved from

    http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211295

Wilhelm, J.D. (2008). *"You Gotta Be the Book" Teaching engaged and reflective reading with*

    adolescents. New York. Teachers College Press.

Willis, G. & Allen, A. (1978). Patterns of phenomenological response to curricula: Implications.

    In G. Willis (Ed.). *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism*

    (34-71*).*Berkeley, CA. McCutchan.

Wood, K. D & Algozzine, R. (1994). Teaching reading to high-risk learners: A unified

    perspective. Boston. Allyn and Bacon.

Wormeli, R. (2006). *Fair Isn't Always Equal: Grading and assessing in the differentiated*

    classroom. Stenhouse.

Yeh. S.S. (2006). High Stakes Testing: Can rapid assessment reduce the pressure?

    Teachers College Record, 108(4), 621-661.

Ysseldyke, J.E., Nelson, J.R., Johnson, D.R., Christenson, S., Dennison, A., Sharpe, M., &

    Hawes, M. (2004). What we know and need to know about the consequences of

    large-scale assessments for students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 71 (1)*,

    75-96.

Zhang, D., Ryan, J.B., & Jones, J. (2007) High stakes testing and students with disabilities:

    Challenges and promises. *Journal of Disability Policy Study, 18(3),* 160-167.

Appendix A - Questionnaire

Student Questionnaire

How do you understand what it means to be literate?

    1What does it mean to be literate? Is there a difference between being literate and being able to read?

    2.. What are characteristics of a literate person? Who you call yourself one? Why and why not?

What lived experiences do you have that shape your perceptions of being a literate being?

    4. What are things that have been said or done to you to become a better reader?

    5. What are things that have been said or done to your to shape you as a literate being?

    6. If you are a literate being what opportunities would you have available to you?

How do you understand being in a high stakes testing environment?

    7. What do you think before, during and after as well as prepare for high stake testing? Is that an appropriate reflection of you as a thinker?

Draw yourself engaged in literate behaviors.

Draw yourself in a high stakes testing environment.

Appendix B - Interview Questions

Possible Student Interview Questions

How do you understand what it means to be literate?

1. Do you like to read?

2. What types of reading do you do at school? For pleasure?

3. Where do you read?

4. How do you go about reading something new?

5. What types of writing do you do in school? Between your friend? Outside of school?

How do students understand being in a high stakes testing environment?

6. What are the high stakes tests that you have to take (or have taken) this year?

7. Which one is/was the easiest? The hardest? Why?

8. How important are these tests to you? Why?

9. What do you think of the high stakes reading test?

10. What types of preparations did you do for the high stakes reading test?

11. What type of effort did you put into the practice tests in September and December? The actual test?

12. Where did you test? Did that location have an effect on your testing ability?

13. How does your score reflect your ability as a reader?

14. Do you compare your scores with your friends?

15. Do you feel less able if your friends score higher than you?

What lived experiences do students have that shape their perceptions of being literate?

16. Where have you gone to school?

17. Describe what you remember about reading in elementary school? Middle school? High school?

18. Who was your favorite teacher? English teacher? Why? Your least favorite teacher? English teacher? Why?

19. Have you ever received additional support for your reading? Supplemental? Enrichment?

20. Describe how you communicate with others.

Draw yourself engaged in literate behaviors.

Draw yourself in a high stakes testing environment.

Additional Interview questions. Asked after graduated from high school.

Please answer each question with as much detail as possible.

1. What type of reading have you done since high school (for work, for school, of pleasure)?
2. If you are taking classes, where are you attending? Why did you choose that school?
   a. Have you declared a major? If so, what is it? Why did you choose that major?
   b. If you are not declared, what area are you leaning towards? Why?
3. If you are working, what type of job do you have?
   a. Why did you choose that job?
   b. What type of reading do you have to do for that job?

4. How would you describe your success while you were in high school? What were you good at? What did you enjoy doing?
   a. What challenges did you have in high school? How did you overcome those challenges?
5. How do you describe your success out of high school? What are you good at in school or in work?
   a. What challenges have you faced since high school (in work or at school)? How are you overcoming those challenges?

6. If you are taking classes, what type of classroom are you in? Traditional classroom with a teacher and you are in a classroom? Science or math lab classes? On line classes?
   a. If you take a different types of classes, which do you like better? Why? Which do you enjoy least? Why?
   b. On average, how much reading do you have to do a day? A week? Answer in time or chapters?
   c. Which classes do you have more reading to do?
   d. How do you study? What types of things do you do?
   e. Does talking about what you have read help you? Why or why not?

Think about the types of reading that you do.

7. How well do you interpret (understand, comprehend, remember) what you have to read?
   a. Does it depend on the type of material that you have to read?
   b. What type of reading is easier for you to do? More difficult to do?
8. Explain what you do to prepare to read something new.
9. Have you gotten assistance with reading for your classes?
   a. Explain what that looks like.
10. How do you attack difficult vocabulary?

11. What types of things do you do to help you retain the information for your classes or your job? Or both?
12. How do you feel when you are reading for pleasure, for school or for your job?
13. Do you think you are a good reader? Why?
14. How do you think others view you as a reader? As a student? As an employee?

Appendix C - Student Informed Consent Form

SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY

Junction City High School

900 N. Eisenhower

Junction City, Kansas 66441
785-717-4209

Informed Consent to be Interviewed

The Study and Your Participation
You are being asked to participate in several 30 to 45 minute interview to assist in a research project by providing insight through your unique perspective as yourself as a literate being in a high stakes testing environment. This case study is specifically designed to try to record students lived experiences in relation to literacy and high stakes testing at the secondary level. Gaining the students perceptions of themselves and high stakes testing will help teachers understand the students that they are teaching and improve their instruction.

This research is being conducted by Stephanie McNemar, doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Kansas State University, and also teacher at Junction City High School. This research will be used for her dissertation, and scholarly presentations and papers.

What to Expect
You will be asked several questions to solicit your personal perceptions of yourself as a literate being in a high stakes testing environment. Questions will relate to your experiences in school, in literacy and in high stakes testing environments. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The digital files will be deleted upon completion of the study.

Potential Risks
Risks to you are minimal, yet may include you divulging more information than you are comfortable doing. For that purpose, your identity will remain confidential as outlined below. Further, you may withhold information or withdraw from the study prior to publication as described below.

Confidentiality
Every attempt will be made to protect the confidentiality of your identity in relation to the context of your interview. In order to maintain authenticity in reporting the findings of this research study, extensive quotes may be used in the final publication without identifying you as the source, either by name or by inference. You will have the right to review and withhold any material you have provided through this interview prior to publication.

Right to Withdraw
You have the right to withdraw completely from the study at any time during or after the interview, and before publication of the results, with absolutely no penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact:

Dr. Jeong-Hee Kim, Faculty Researcher   Rick Scheidt, Chair
Bluemont Hall 357   Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects
Kansas State University   203 Fairchild Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506   Kansas State University
(785) 532-6976   Manhattan, KS 66506
                                                (785) 532-3224

I understand this project is research, and that my participation if completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

_____   _____
Participants signature   Date

_____
Printed Name of Participant

Appendix D - Parental Letter of Consent for Minors

SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY

Junction City High School

900 N. Eisenhower

Junction City, Kansas 66441
785-717-4209

Parental Letter of Consent for Minors
Research Study of Students' Perceptions of Themselves as Literate Beings in a High Stakes Testing Environment

Dear Parent of Guardian,

I am a doctoral candidate and researcher working under the direction of Dr. Jeong-Hee Kim, Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Kansas State University. I am conducting a research study to learn about students' perceptions of themselves as literate beings in a high stakes testing environment. Your child has participated in high stakes testing in the Spring of 2011.

We are requesting your child's participation in this research study, which involves interviews with your child between June 2011 and July 2011. The interview will be conducted by Stephanie McNemar on the school grounds of Junction City High School. The interview will be audio-recorded and the digital files will be deleted upon completion of the study. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participates or to withdraw you child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty such as affecting your child's grade. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call Stephanie McNemar 785-717-4200 x5860, of Dr. Jeong-Hee Kim at 785-532-6976.

Sincerely,

Stephanie McNemar   Dr. Jeong-Hee Kim
Doctoral Candidate and Researcher   Assistant Professor
Junction City High School   Department of Curriculum and Instruction
900 Eisenhower   Kansas State University
Junction City KS, 66441   Phone 785-532-6976
785-717-4200 x 5860

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child, _____
to participate in the above study.

_____ _____ _____
Signature   Printed Name   Date

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you are your child have been place at risk because of the participation, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subject s Institutional Review Board, Rick Scheidt at 785-532-3224.

Appendix E - IRB Approval

KANSAS STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y | University Research
Compliance Office

TO: Jeong-Hee Kim   Proposal Number: 5886
Curriculm and Instructions
Bluemont 357

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: June 27, 2011

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Literacy is power: Nurturing Special Education Students
as Literate Beings in a Secondary High Stakes Testing Environment."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full
approval. This proposal is **approved for <u>one year</u> from the date of this correspondence, pending
"continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: June 22, 2011

EXPIRATION DATE: June 22, 2012

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally
mandated **"continuing review"** of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity
for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is <u>not</u> granted, or the IRB fails to perform the
continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity
involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are
responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to
continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

☒ There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
☐ There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification
affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are
subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected
with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this
approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to
subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.