

LITERACY IN THE 21st CENTURY: SUPPORTING
STRUGGLING ADOLESCENT READERS

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by
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2013

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative bounded case study research was to describe the different perspectives of five struggling readers regarding contributing factors to their literacy experiences and success. The theoretical framework used to make meaning included: (a) high schools and literacy, (b) school culture, (c) motivation, (d) technology, and (e) literacy as the gateway of life.

The qualitative case study methodology provided an in-depth investigation into each case, where the perceptions of the individuals were explored for a deeper understanding of the experiences each participant had with literacy during their three years at one Midwestern high school. Five case studies were drawn from the initial larger sample of 15 participants identified through a criterion sampling process. The overarching question that guided this study was: What perceptions do the participants have in regards to their literacy success? With the following research questions helping to guide this study:

1. What perceptions do the participants have in regards to how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences?
2. What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the students' experiences with literacy?
3. What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy?
4. What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy?

Official achievement data, narratives, and interviews were utilized for data collection and analysis. The most significant findings of this study were the similarities in how the participants described their personal literacy experiences. All of the participants shared similar perceptions in regards to their self-image, their successes and achievements, their struggles and the degree to which they attributed their literacy success to their teachers. It was evident that all of the participants depended heavily on their teachers for their success. The dependence on their teachers was evident as the participants sought one-on-one assistance with their teachers outside of class when they did not understand the concepts or text during class. While all of these participants struggled with literacy they also were able to find success by graduating on time and with GPAs that were a 2.5 or higher.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “Literacy in the 21st Century: Supporting Struggling Adolescent Readers Doctor of Education Degree, and certify that in their opinion is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is not just the ability to read, write and speak a language, it is defined as “listening, viewing, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, and expressing through multiple symbol systems at a developmentally appropriate level” (Moxley & Taylor, 2006, p. 2) . Literacy promotes development of knowledge and potential, while also encompassing the type of reading that is required for mandatory state assessments, which includes the ability to make inferences, to learn new vocabulary, to link ideas, to identify and summarize the most important ideas of a text, and to think about the meaning of what is read in order to be able to answer questions. “More than eight million adolescents have not mastered the reading skills necessary for them to successfully respond to demanding secondary school requirements or compete for meaningful jobs in the workplace” (Hock et al., 2009, p. 21). According to Grant and Wong (2003) students who fail to meet the grade-level requirements and competencies will face ‘limited school success, reduced opportunities for college and technology training, restricted access to well-paid jobs and failure to become full participants in a democratic society’ (p. 3). It is very common to see students put their heads down and give up when they reach their frustration point. This brings to mind a specific student that I have known for several years. When I first met the student in eighth grade the student did all classroom activities, except those activities that required reading and writing. Like many teachers I attributed the student’s behavior to laziness. Now two years later the student is struggling in all areas and his mother has even asked for help for her son. In looking back into the student’s academic performance records it shows that this student has been struggling with

reading since fifth grade. It is often questioned how this is overlooked and not addressed prior to the student entering high school. This student shows typical signs of shutting down and avoiding assignments, which could be a sign that it is easier to avoid the activity rather than trying and failing. The Student Assistance Program team is now working on addressing this student to see what can be done to help this student find success before he becomes another drop out statistic. To raise expectations it will require changes in the beliefs of our teachers and our students and the expectation is that everyone will have to work harder, but that achievement levels should improve.

The Problem

Many high school students struggle to perform at academically proficient levels, which is often attributed to low literacy skills. According to Hock et al. (2009) “Adolescents who arrive in high school lacking a solid foundation in core reading skills have a greatly reduced probability of graduating with a standard diploma” (p. 33), which means without a standard diploma secondary education will not be accessible unless the student seeks an alternative such as a GED. Greenleaf and Hinchman (2009) stated that according to the U.S. Census Bureau there were 3.9 million eighth graders in 2007 in the United States and that 26 percent of those eighth grade students who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test did not acquire basic levels of literacy, and only 31% achieved proficiency - - meaning that roughly 1 million eighth graders were identified as being at basic literacy levels and another 1.7 million had not attained the level of proficient (p. 4). “168,200 eighth-graders participated in the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading . . .at grade 8, the average reading score in 2011 was 1 point higher than in 2009, and 5 points higher than in 1992” as reported in The Nation’s Report

Card (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011, p. 1). Snipes (2008) stated “NAEP trends suggest that reading scores among students ages 13 and 17 have changed very little over the past thirty years” (p. 1). This leads me to question whether the needs of the struggling readers are being met and if we are helping them to be more successful through the utilization of a variety of literacy strategies at the high school level. To identify struggling readers the following has been set based on expectations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Act for annual yearly progress:

Those who score at or below the 40th percentile were defined as struggling readers, whereas those who scored above the 40th percentile were defined as proficient readers . . . The 40th percentile was chosen because students scoring at this mark are almost one third of a standard deviation below the expected mean standard score, and thus below the expectation set by No Child Left Behind that all children read at grade level. (Hock et al., 2009, p. 25)

It is due to the lack of literacy skills that we have struggling readers at the secondary level. It is my goal to determine if our efforts in our classrooms are truly helping these struggling readers to be more successful or not.

As educators we face failure if we are not able to provide students with the essential skills and knowledge they need to survive in today’s technologically complex world. Anstey and Bull (2006) insist that in our world today students need to be multi-literate, which means being literate, both cognitively and socially, with paper, live and electronic texts. Hock et al. (2009) reported that “overall 68% of students score below the proficient level in reading. . . and nearly 65% of adolescents read below the ‘satisfactory’ level on state reading assessments” (p. 22). Reis and Fogarty (2006) reported that many students, especially those who are children of color and children of poverty, are unprepared for success in college or jobs according to their standardized reading achievement scores. Discussions of test scores,

or achievement gaps are becoming commonplace. “Equitable achievement on relatively low-level state assessments is generally not sufficient in indicating ‘true’ achievement equity when large gaps remain on other, more challenging indicators of student performance” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 272). Some educators believe that students from lower social economic means, those with limited English proficiency, low ability levels or the lack of motivation are unable to meet higher academic standards. It should be the belief of all educators that all students can learn and they should be willing to work at providing all students with strategies to help them find success. According to Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O’Neal, and Cusenbary (2000) “a majority of student readers improve their skills through 8th grade, many fall behind between grades 8 and 12” (p. 10).

It is also suggested that students who live in an urban environment seem to be at an even higher risk for failing school, not passing their classes to gain credits towards graduation, compared to those who are from suburban areas. According to McWayne, Fantuzzo, and McDermott (2004) living in an urban area “exacerbates the educational risk of low-income status; poor children living in urban centers evidence higher rates of school failure than poor children living in other settings” (p. 633). Deshler, Hock, and Catts (2006) refer to students that are not on track, meaning earning credits for the classes they are in, and how “devastating freshman-year failure can be . . . just one semester F decreases the likelihood of graduating from 83% to 60%, a second semester F decreases the likelihood to 44%” (p. 6). Dropout rates, according to Grey (2008), estimate that nearly 1.2 million public high school students drop out every year (p. 1). Chapman, Laird, KewalRamani (2010), in a compendium report for The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2008 “the event dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about four and one-half

times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (8.7 percent vs. 2.0 percent)” (p. 6). These statistics just emphasize the achievement gap as related to socioeconomic status and location. According to Hock et al. (2009) the high rate of high school dropouts has a direct correlation to adolescents who lack a solid foundation in core reading skills and these same students will have a greater probability of not graduating with a standard high school diploma (p. 35).

A study that was sponsored by America’s Promise Alliance shows a difference between dropout rates of urban high schools compared to suburban high schools where “high school graduation rates are 15 percentage points lower in urban schools as compared to those in the suburbs” (Grey, 2008, para. 4). According to Grey (2008) Rick Dalton, president of College for Every Student, a nonprofit organization committed to raising the academic aspirations and performance of underserved youth so that they can prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college, said the urban-suburban divergence “just speaks to the crisis in the U.S. It is about income. Family income drives it all” (para. 11). These statistics regarding high school dropout rates and the connection to low levels of literacy are alarming. I believe if we address this issue and use a variety of teaching strategies in all content areas that focus on literacy, then we can help our adolescents that are struggling with literacy to improve. As a result this will then improve their chances of graduating from high school and they will be better prepared to take on the challenges of life in a global economy. Cookson (2009) states that “current high school dropout rates clearly indicate that our standardized testing regime and outdated curriculums are wasting the potential of our youth” (p. 14).

Struggling readers often “have no confidence in themselves as students and feel disengaged” (Santa, 2006, p. 468) and are often grouped as “struggling, reluctant, at-risk,

disadvantaged, alienated, resistant, and educationally deprived adolescent readers together under the term *reluctant readers*” (Lenters, 2006, p. 137). According to Clarke (2006) the high school students’ reluctance to read is not uncommon (p. 66). These readers often attribute their reading failure to factors such as task difficulty, noise, interference, and unfair teachers (Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O’Neal, & Cusenbary, 2000, p. 7). For some reason there is also a trend that is debilitating in “which middle school becomes a point at which learning how to get by without reading can take precedence over learning to be a better reader” (Lenters, 2006, p. 142). Gallagher (2010) stated that since No Child Left Behind became law test preparation has shaped almost all of our students’ entire school experiences. Gallagher (2010) continued by stating that educators are aware of the commonly cited culprits associated with the decline of reading, which include poverty, lack of parent education, print-poor environments at home, second-language issues, the over-scheduling of children, and competition from electronic media (p. 37).

Reading needs to be brought into students’ lives as pleasurable. Gallagher (2010) maintains “students that read for fun have higher reading scores than students who rarely read for enjoyment . . . I never had a student receive a high verbal score who was not a voracious reader” (p. 40). Students need time that is specifically designated for leisure reading, such as Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), which has a specific time it is implemented each day and where the students are able to choose their reading materials. If the student relates to the topic or has an interest in learning about a specific topic then they are more likely to read without being forced. If forced to read then many struggling readers become reluctant readers.

In my current position as a teacher I am required to work with struggling readers within the content area that I teach, which is art, but I was also the facilitator or overseer of the program that we previously used to monitor the progress of the identified struggling readers. As a teacher, my work includes imbedding interventions within my lessons to address the literacy strands that have been adopted as a building goal, but I still question whether the work we are doing is truly getting the desired results or not. Personally I had never really thought about how I taught my content area and whether I focused on including literacy, or not, until I began working in my current position in 2007. It was at this time that due to the building having a goal that addressed the literacy of all students that forced me to integrate literacy strategies into my lessons, which I had actually been doing, but not on the same level of awareness as was now required. I believe that in regards to my use of literacy strategies within my lessons, that I will receive mixed perspectives on whether our Individual Learning Plan (ILP) system and the interventions that we incorporate will really help the struggling adolescent readers. This is why conducting in-depth interviews and looking for themes was necessary when conducting this study.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative bounded case study research was to explore the different perspectives of five struggling readers regarding their literacy experiences. This study was intended to discover the student perceptions of contributing factors to their literacy success as revealed through the descriptions of their experiences within classrooms and outside of school. For the purpose of this study, struggling readers were defined as those who scored below basic level on their Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Lexile scores and who also scored a 14 or below on their ACT Plan. I examined the different perspectives of the students

to determine if they felt their teachers were successfully addressing their needs as struggling readers. Case studies focus “on the presentation of specific cases and thematic analysis across cases” (Creswell, 2007, p. 297), capturing and reporting individualized outcomes based on how participants changed during the study. Stake (2005) states that case study research is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied, others present it as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy. The unit of analysis for this study was the experiences of the students with literacy.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of interest to the staff in the building where the study occurred as well as other educators and policymakers at the state and national levels. Specifically policymakers may find this of interest since currently more resources and research findings are attributed to children’s literacy and adult remediation literacy than compared to adolescent literacy (Lenters, 2006; McCormack & Paratore, 2003; Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Vacca, 2002). It may also be of interest to the parents of students that are identified as struggling readers as it may give them insights into the perceptions of those who are identified as struggling readers and whether or not they benefited from the specific interventions utilized by their teachers. The study can contribute to the practices of the staff who work with identified struggling readers, to help them become successful during their high school years by demonstrating proficiency in literacy, as they will be able to gain an understanding of what the students that participated in the study saw as strategies that worked for them and whether or not they felt their literacy skills improved.

The literature covers the topic of struggling adolescent readers in depth and it offers an abundance of strategies that are promised to improve the reading abilities of these students. “Reading is more than decoding” (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 22). Reading uses many different strategies, such as thinking strategies, but it also must have background knowledge to build upon when introducing new information. Good interventions can make a difference. A variety of strategies that teachers can use include anticipatory activities, questioning, note taking, graphic organizers, vocabulary instruction, reciprocal teaching, pre-reading strategies, connections to prior knowledge and prediction. It is also suggested that textbooks are not enough, but that we need to infuse our teaching with “authentic, real-world nonfiction- the kind of informational, expository, persuasive texts that adults really read” (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 47).

Research Questions

Central or overarching questions that this study addressed include the following:

Overarching question:

What perceptions do the participants have in regards to their literacy success?

- 1) What perceptions do the participants have in regards to how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences?
 - a. How do the students describe their literacy experiences in their classes, regardless of the subject?
 - b. What benefits do students identify from these classroom experiences?
 - c. Where do students use literacy in school specifically any setting (i.e.: classes, library, interactions with others, etc.)?

- 2) What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the students' experiences with literacy?
 - a. Where do students use literacy outside of school?
 - b. How are literacy strategies applied outside of school?
- 3) What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy?
- 4) What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy?

Theoretical Framework

As previously stated many high school students struggle with literacy and while educators attempt to address this problem with various strategies it was my intention to determine through the students' perceptions of their experiences if they felt they were being helped to be more successful through the utilization of a variety of literacy strategies in their high school classes. Hence, the purpose of this narrative bounded case study was to describe the different perspectives of the struggling readers regarding their success with literacy. I wanted to know if the strategies used in their classes were meeting their needs or if they had other methods they found to be beneficial in helping them with their struggles with literacy as described through their experiences.

In conducting a search of the literature, the majority of information that focused on adolescent literacy suggested strategies to support struggling readers. However, I definitely found a gap in the literature regarding inclusion of students' perspectives on their literacy education, as I did not find any research that included the perspectives of the students who struggled with literacy. There was limited research regarding how adolescents and their

literacy levels are determined and viewed, which is evident in the amount of research and public funding that has been designated to early literacy intervention, making it appear as if the literacy needs of older students are less important (Lenters, 2006; McCormack & Paratore, 2003; Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Vacca, 2002).

High Schools and Literacy

Gallagher (2010) offered several explanations for why adolescents struggle with literacy, which include poverty, lack of parent education, print poor environments at home, second-language issues, the over-scheduling of children, and competition from electronic media (p. 37). With the focus being on teaching to the standards so our students will do well on high-stakes state assessments, the teaching becomes less in-depth due to the amount of material that is required to be covered. “And when coverage trumps depth, close reading—the kind students need to develop their ability to read critically— gives way to surface-level, ‘one and done’ reading” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 38). The literature also referred to what may happen when secondary students struggle in terms of the actions they might take, which included dropping out of school (Anonymous, 2008; Ehren, Lenz, & Deshler, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Schumaker et al., 2006). The literature suggested that instruction must be designed for “rigorous, inquiry-based instruction that integrates academic content and discipline-appropriate habits of thinking” (McConachie, et al., 2006, p. 8) to provide students with “the skills and strategies they need to reverse their pattern of failure” (Salinger, 2003, p. 84). Deshler, Hock, and Catts (2006) stated “instruction that is especially intensive and focused is necessary for students reading several years behind grade level . . . the most effective literacy programs are ones that offer instruction at various levels of

intensity, are comprehensive, and are well coordinated” (p. 4). Other strategies included making sure the students had time to read for pleasure each day to teaching students how to read closely to help them understand the content to teaching students how to think and read critically. Deshler, Hock and Catts (2006) also imply “some students benefit when teachers use graphic organizers . . . others need learning strategies embedded in content material, explicit strategy instruction, or instruction in basic skills or even the basic language elements that are the foundation of literacy competence”(p. 4).

Much of the research focuses on early literacy instruction, which is imperative in creating a foundation of literacy competency. Juel, Griffith, and Gough (1986) focused on the literacy instruction of first and second graders typically conducted during the early years of education. They included a sample of 129 first grade children that were tested in first grade and then continued to be tested in second grade, but by that second year there were 80 that remained in the study. The participants were placed in one of two basal reading series at the beginning of first grade with their teachers providing a daily 20 to 30 minute whole-class phonics lessons using a district script. The students were tested in IQ, oral language and listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, exposure to print, cipher knowledge and lexical knowledge, word recognition and spelling, reading comprehension, writing and ideas, which came from verbal stories told by the children. The data were analyzed with hierarchical multiple regression and some with analysis of variance. The findings demonstrated an extreme importance of phonemic awareness in the acquisition of literacy and that word recognition and spelling are strongly correlated, but the relation between reading comprehension and writing appears to be less strongly correlated in the early stages of literacy acquisition (Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986, p. 254). While many studies focus on

the needs and learning acquisition of young children understanding the foundational skills, determining the needs of the adolescents that are struggling with literacy, is also important.

Many high school students struggle to perform at academically proficient levels, which is often attributed to low literacy skills. As educators we face failure if we are not able to provide students with the essential skills and knowledge they need to survive in today's technologically complex world. By high school the texts have changed and the reading skills required to read these more difficult texts have also changed (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Clarke, 2006; Wilhelm, 2001). This is the basis for the rationale for selecting the topics for review because these topics repeatedly appear in the literature that focuses on adolescent literacy. Along with high school literacy the selected topics include school culture, motivation, technology and literacy as the gateway of life, which all contribute to dropout rates, unmotivated or reluctant learners, the effects of increased technology, referred to as 21st century skills, for success with post-secondary opportunities, and expectations and strategies that are suggested to help these struggling readers. Based on my review of the literature, these topics are significant to understanding the phenomenon associated with struggling adolescent readers. Limited literature from students' perspectives suggests that educators and researchers need to more rigorously address adolescent literacy with the views of students in mind.

School Culture that Supports Literacy

Many factors can be attributed to the success or failure of our struggling readers, according to Tovani (2010) including background knowledge, motivation and purpose. (p. 28). One would hope that all teachers are teaching with the purpose of doing what is best for the students, which in this case would be embedding literacy in their instruction to help their

struggling readers find success within their classroom. “We assume that the entire school is focused on literacy achievement . . . that the history, science, math, English, art, music, and other teachers ensure that students are developing strategic reading skills as they read for information” (Fischer & Ivey, 2006, p. 181).

Older struggling readers will benefit from extra time to focus on literacy, but so will all readers, even those who do not struggle. It depends on teachers learning specific instructional strategies through professional development, implementing daily independent reading time and a schedule that will provide reading and writing opportunities in all content area classes. Regardless of where the blame is laid for why students are not proficient readers, it is evident that many high school students might not be ready for the academic and real-world literacy demands that they will be facing in their futures (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008; Wagner, 2000).

Due to the pressures of high stakes testing many teachers are forced to cover so much content. Therefore, teachers often use handouts and condensed reading passages, or lecture format to convey information rather than spending time “to attend to the more significant literacy needs of some young people” (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009, p. 5). Many of our young people depend on the teacher for understanding of the text, which allows them to avoid reading altogether. It is important to monitor progress and provide feedback. “When adolescents have experienced years of failure and frustration, keeping them motivated requires that they see their progress immediately and on a regular basis” (Curtis & Longo, 1999, p. 43). For students to be successful it is suggested that teachers make connections with the students, which require creating a community with students. It is the positive human

relationships and the sense of belonging within the community that will help students feel connected (Santa, 2006; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993).

Also important to the success of the students is the culture of the school. Hoy and Hannum (1997) investigated the importance of school health, culture, and student achievement (p. 291) in 86 urban, suburban, and rural middle schools throughout the state of New Jersey that represented low, middle, and high socioeconomic levels. A 45 item inventory using a Likert-type scale included items related to academic emphasis, teacher affiliation, collegial leadership, resource support, principal influence and institutional integrity using an aggregated measure supported by a second-order factor analysis. Student achievement was measured using the state's Eighth Grade Early Warning Test, which measures achievement in reading, math and writing. Data was collected from teachers at faculty meetings, a random sample of one third of the staff responded to climate measures, and almost all of the teachers selected responded to the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and multiple regression analysis were used to test the independent variables. The study found most of the dimensions of school health and culture were positively associated with student achievement, but collegial leadership and the influence of the principal did not have an independent effect on student achievement. According to Hoy and Hannum (1997) academic achievement is related to healthy interpersonal dynamics of schools, but the SES of the community is also important in predicting student achievement. The culture of the school is important and is an area to be further explored in connection not only to the achievement levels of students, but to their literacy learning.

Motivation Theory for Reluctant Readers

Struggling readers often have little confidence, become reluctant readers and have low motivation for learning. These readers' struggles may be attributed to various factors which may include lacking fluency in word reading, word recognition, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension of the text (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006; Hock et al., 2005). The struggling students may even attribute their reading failure to factors such as task difficulty, noise, interference, and unfair teachers (Wallace, 1995). For some reason there is also a trend that is debilitating in "which middle school becomes a point at which learning how to get by without reading can take precedence over learning to be a better reader" (Lenters, 2006, p. 142). According to Gallager (2010), "Young people in the United States are not just substandard readers, they are increasingly reluctant readers—even in their free time" (p. 37). Reading needs to be brought into students' lives as pleasurable. Students need time that is specifically designated for leisure reading, such as Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), which has a specific time it is implemented each day and where the students are able to choose their reading materials. If the student relates to the topic or has an interest in learning about a specific topic then they are more likely to read without being forced. If forced to read then many struggling readers become reluctant readers.

The interest of the students to what they are reading directly connects to Schiefele's (1990) study that centered on interests students might have in a topic, described as a content-specific intrinsic motivational orientation. The study involved 53 male university students assigned based on a questionnaire to either a high-topic-interest or a low-topic-interest group (p. 326). Pretest posttest methods were used as the participants were asked in the instructions to indicate how they expected to feel while reading the actual text and to rate the topic's personal meaning. Ratings were based on four-point scales with responses summed to yield

total interest values. After the participants read the text they were given a comprehension test designed to distinguish among three different levels of understanding. The text used was not related to the participants' major and since the participants were told they were rating a text they were not aware they would be tested comprehensively over the material. The data analysis used a 2 x 3 MANOVA while additional comparisons used the T Test. The results showed no correlation between level of interest and intelligence. This study did show that topic interest is an important motivational condition for text comprehension (p. 334). According to Schiefele (1990) the findings suggested that the longer a person works in a topic area that greater the level of interest and the more a person will learn. It was recommended that to validate the findings a longitudinal study be conducted (p. 336). Interest in a topic can be beneficial, but there are other reasons why students lack motivation to read.

Students can be reluctant readers due to struggling with reading. My son was a reluctant reader as a teenager. When he was in first grade he struggled with reading to the point that the teacher was going to recommend that he be retained. As we were traveling one day we were playing a game in the car, which consisted of finding letters of the alphabet on billboards and road signs. As we neared the middle of the alphabet my son was not able to find the letter 'k'. As we continued on there were several letters that he could not find. It finally dawned on me that he was not recognizing the block letters since he had been taught the D'Nealian-style Letters. I made some flashcards and worked with him to recognize the letters of the alphabet in both block letters and D'Nealian-style letters. Then we saw a profound change in his reading. His teacher made the comment that she had never seen a student advance so quickly, which he would not have if I had not figured out the problem

since the teacher had no idea that this was the issue with why he struggled to learn to read. As my son grew older he seemed to enjoy reading, but only when it was something that he was interested in, such as Harry Potter. As school began to require tests to be taken over books from a list that were supposed to be more for pleasure, my son seemed to dislike reading more and more. He was always able to read, when it interested him and when he wanted to read, but he definitely was becoming a reluctant reader.

The idea that adolescents read less as they mature definitely fit my son, but the concept of finding texts that they are interested in will help with their motivation also fits this scenario. When he was a freshman in high school his English teacher took the time to find books that fit his interests for him to read and she also made sure that an Accelerated Reader (AR) test was available so that he would be able to fulfill the reading requirements for the class. It was like a double-edged sword though, he would read if it was something that he was interested in, but he continued to resist reading for class more and more. It was as if his interest in reading was being killed, due to the fact that he had to take tests over what he read instead of just being able to read for pleasure. Lenters (2006) states “resistant readers risk becoming struggling readers. To engage resistant readers, teachers should allow students more choice and respect their out-of-school literacies” (p. 136), which is exactly what my son’s teacher demonstrated.

Expectations – do our expectations about struggling readers give them permission to give up? It’s no wonder that by high school, they have often given up on themselves. Inadvertently schools and teachers have given many struggling readers the message that no one believes they can or will read in school. “Our low expectations give students an excuse to opt out of improving” (Tovani, 2010, p. 26). If we want struggling readers to take a risk

then we have to encourage them and show them that we have confidence in their abilities. It is the educator's responsibility to be aware when struggling learners are getting frustrated. We need to work at assisting them in trying to avoid that level of frustration.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) looked at teacher expectations on student achievement and they concluded that "the results indicated strongly that children from whom teachers expected greater intellectual gains showed such gains" (p. 184). It seems clear that high expectations require active involvement (Dale, 2005; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003). As teachers we need to make sure that our students are actively engaged, but we also have to step back and allow the students to take some responsibility for their own learning. "It also demonstrates that the teachers believe their students are capable of learning with carefully planned direction. . . that the teacher trusts the students to share and discuss information gained and completed in the assigned work" (Schmidt, 2005, p. 32). Schools that had cultures of high expectations "focused on academics; school practices were geared toward preparing students for college and careers; and teachers and administrators consistently stressed achievement"(Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 88).

Technology

Technology is advancing at a rapid pace, however, "The skills students need in the 21st century are not new" (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009, p. 16). It has been reported that many eighth grade students are not able to read material that is essential to daily living, such as road signs, newspapers, or bus schedules, much less have the skills needed to be successful in a global economy (Hock et al., 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). "Literacy demands have increased and changed as the technological capabilities of our society have expanded and been made widely available; concomitantly, the need for

flexible, self-regulated individuals who can respond to rapidly changing contexts has also increased” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 9). In order to be strategic and flexible in our changing world all students must become multi-literate persons. Students need to obtain reading skills that go beyond decoding. They need to include being able to critically analyze texts and contexts, to be able to make inferences and take informed actions. Much of the information that is now available is quickly accessed, as our digital culture provides us with immediacy and speed.

While immediacy and speed to affect the use of the technology the abilities of students to use the technology and their comfort level can be factors in their desire to use the computers. A study conducted by Thatcher and Perrewe (2002) looked at the pattern of relationships among information technology (IT) and individual differences, which included computer anxiety and computer self-efficacy (p. 382). While we often refer to young people as technology gurus we often forget about the comfort level, or lack of, that some individuals experience. The sample included students from a large public university in the U.S. that completed self-reported questionnaires the first week of the spring semester during regularly scheduled class times. 280 were invited to participate and 235 actually responded, with 211 being used in the final analysis. This was a quantitative study that used partial least squares to analyze the data. A limitation of this study was the sampling since it was limited to voluntary respondents enrolled in classes in a business school. The findings suggested by Thatcher and Perrewe (2002) state that training may sensitize the participants which leads them to report higher levels of computer anxiety. The findings suggest that understanding the sources of self-efficacy or anxiety that influence IT training’s effectiveness may help in the design and placement of people in training programs (p. 391). If we hope for greater success

in the future adolescents need to be trained how to use the technology at a level they are comfortable with and do not have high levels of anxiety. In my experiences, since I teach in a computer lab, until students are assured that they can learn the technical programs and until they experience guidance and success their anxiety levels often hinder their learning.

The digital culture has changed how we learn to read and acquire information. It may even change how we think. Students not only need to be able to read, but to think, and/or comprehend what they are reading. According to Wolf and Barzillai (2009), Socrates cautioned against learning to read as “he believed that literacy could alter the kind of memory and probative processes required for the young to deeply pursue and internalize knowledge," (p.33). Socrates worried that young people would believe what they read as truth rather than searching for the truth. It is suggested that the digital medium might have similar issues for our young learners. “This great gift of easily accessible, readily available, rich information has the potential to form a more passive and an even more easily ‘deluded’ learner” (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009, p. 35). Now that many of our young readers are garnering their information from the web, rather than reading books, our students are often unable to evaluate whether the information is useful or distracting. It has also been suggested that while the digital information presents both richness and new challenges to our readers, both visually and verbally, it is also a potentially great distraction, while requiring the reader to understand how to evaluate and make meaning of the information. Many of our struggling readers use the digital information systems to help them find sources quickly and without a lot of output or reading on their part. Is the information too easily accessible? This is a question that educators must consider while attempting to encourage those struggling readers to utilize resources that will help to entice them to read.

Literacy as the Gateway of Life

There is much that can be done to address the literacy needs of our students. “Many literacy experts point out that even capable and advantaged kids benefit by learning strategies that enhance comprehension” (McGrath, 2005, p. 3). Many of our students can read, but they do not really understand what they read. It is important that our students are not just at grade level in their reading, but they need to have advanced literacy skills for a better chance at a good life. It is important to assist our students by helping them to see themselves as thriving readers, treat them as capable and competent and use expert teaching to help them in developing the knowledge and strategies that they need to achieve academic success as well as success in life.

Helping students to find success begins in prek-12 schools and will hopefully continue in their futures. A study by Goddard and Goddard (2007) focused on the relationship between teachers’ collaborative school improvement practices related to student achievement (p. 881). The study was conducted in 47 elementary schools in a large urban Midwestern school district in the U.S. and included 452 teachers and 2,536 fourth grade students. Teachers’ survey data were collected about two months before the students took the mandatory state assessments and assessed teacher collaboration with student data obtained from the central office. . The results of the study indicated that the fourth grade students’ achievement levels were higher in math and reading when there were higher levels of teacher collaboration for school improvement. The study by Goddard and Goddard (2007) indicated that student achievement improves when teachers have opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction and professional development. It was stated that this relationship could be indirect as the teacher collaboration could be more of an outcome of

teachers improving their instructional practices (pp. 892-3). By teachers making a difference in the classroom hopefully the students will carry the lessons they learn into how they approach their future and success.

Biancarosa and Snow (2006) state that by strengthening literacy skills the chances for striving readers to graduate from high school will be stronger, independent learners will be prepared to take on multiple challenges of life in our economy that is becoming more global. We are faced with the challenge to “improve academic achievement and reduce racial and socio-economic performance gaps, stem the flood of dropouts, and meet the nation’s growing demand for an educated citizenry . . . our ability to improve adolescent literacy outcomes” (Snipes, 2008, p. 13). It is also our responsibility to prepare our students to be ready to participate in a global economy, which means they need to have skills necessary to function at high levels in the 21st century, which makes these stakes higher than ever faced before.

Overview of the Design and Methods

I elected to conduct a qualitative research methodology since it begins with “assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). This approach included the collection of data in the natural setting and I identified patterns or themes in the data. This approach also considered “the voice of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem” (p. 37). I sought to conduct a study in a location where the problems were apparent which provided the opportunity to collect data associated with the literacy levels of the participants through relevant test scores, to analyze narratives written by the participants, and to use interviews to gain a true picture of the problem from the

perspectives of the participants. Therefore, qualitative research seemed to be the most appropriate style of research to address the phenomenon.

As for the theoretical tradition that I used, a narrative bounded case study was appropriate. A narrative study, described by Clandinin and Huber (in press) “is a way of thinking about, and studying, experience” (p. 1), which begins “with asking participants to tell their stories” (p. 5). The inquiry was also a bounded case study, s “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries, has a finite quality about it either in terms of time, space, and/or components comprising the case (Merriam, 2002, p. 178). As depicted by Creswell (2007), a case study “provides an in-depth study of this ‘system,’ based on a diverse array of data collection materials, and the researcher situates this system or case within its larger ‘context’ or setting” (p. 244). It was my intention to gain a more in-depth understanding based on the perspectives of the participants regarding their experiences with literacy both in school and out of school.

Site and Participant Selection

Five students were identified as struggling readers that have demonstrated literacy proficiency prior to graduating. The site was a suburban, Midwestern high school with about 1,500 students in grades ten through twelve. This was an appropriate setting since I focused on students that were identified as struggling readers their sophomore year and they were 18 years of age. Criterion sampling, as defined by Creswell (2007), as “all cases that meet some criterion” (p. 127) was used to identify participants. Using purposeful sampling qualitative researchers “select information-rich cases strategically and purposefully; specific type and number of cases selected depends on study purpose and resources” (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Participants met all of the specified criteria; identified as reading below grade level their 10th

grade year, demonstrated below grade level reading proficiency during their tenth grade year, and scored 40% or below on their LEXILE score and a 15 or below on their ACT Plan. Purposeful sampling also allows for the selection of participants who will give rich descriptions of the phenomenon, which was determined by asking the participants to write about their literacy experiences. According to Denzin (1989), “the thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings . . . establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person” (p. 83). These students were invited to be interviewed about their experiences with literacy.

Data Collection

The data collection procedures included multiple procedures to ensure validity through triangulation, which is “different data sources of information by examining evidence from sources and using it to build a coherent justification for theme” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). In this study I used the following data sources: (a) official achievement data, which included a reading test in the fall of their 10th grade year that provided a Lexile score, the ACT Plan, a test provided by ACT that serves as a midpoint measure of academic progress, ACT scores, and students’ GPAs; (b) narratives that were written by the students in response to a prompt that I provided; and (c) interviews conducted with the participants. The achievement data that were used are stored in INFORM, which is a data base where state assessments and other base line data are stored.

The narratives were written by the students in story format based on a writing prompt that was given to the identified students. The narratives were documents of the students’ personal stories, which allowed for “the study of experiences through stories” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). These narrative stories of the participants’ experiences allowed for greater

understanding into the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants According to Denzin (1989) ‘The thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings . . . establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person’ (p. 83).

The interviews were after graduation so the selected participants could reflect on their experiences throughout their high school years. The students were asked questions that were predetermined before the interviews (Appendix A) and the interviews were recorded digitally.

Once the data had begun to be collected the analysis began by reviewing the narratives and the interview notes. Once all the narratives and interviews were completed the analysis required reading all the narratives and the interviews to search for themes and relationships, which were coded to determine the frequency of each theme. Through the interviews it was my intention to gather rich data that provided a true picture of how literacy was seen through the perspectives of the participants. The interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to share their perspectives regarding their literacy experiences. The test scores aided in making meaning of the experiences of the participants as they demonstrated their performance on specific tests during their years in high school.

Conclusion

Through this study the perspectives of the participants guided and informed me as I attempted to understand how their struggles with literacy affected them in school and beyond school. There were many factors which were addressed through the experiences and shared details of the participants’ lives that brought about a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The participants of this study had been predetermined in their sophomore year as being a student who struggled with literacy, but all of the participants were on track to

graduate, which means they had been successful despite their obstacles with literacy. While there are many challenges for adolescents who lack literacy skills at the level needed to be successful in school there are also many strategies that can be available to help them overcome these obstacles.

Struggles that adolescents have with literacy need to be addressed by our schools. As our economy is becoming more global the skills that our students will need are changing in ways that we are not able to keep up with, but our students must be able to adapt and be flexible to handle the level of communications that will be needed in the 21st century. As educators we must motivate our students to want to improve and to engage in texts by setting high expectations and believing in our students so they have a sense that they can overcome their literacy deficits. The culture that we build is important to ensure that our students are in a positive learning environment and that they feel confident enough to take risks in their learning. In Chapter 2 literature that supports this study and covers high school literacy, school culture, motivation, technology and literacy as the gateway of life is included. In Chapter 3 I described the rationale for conducting a qualitative study, the theoretical traditions, the role of the researcher, the design of the study, which included the site selection and participants, data collection and analysis, limitations and ethical considerations, validity and reliability and the IRB guidelines. In Chapter 4 the findings from the data, narratives and interviews are discussed sharing the analysis of each source used in this study. In Chapter 5 implications of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed along with the researcher's final thoughts.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Secondary schools' responses for serving struggling adolescent learners and the implication of strong literacy instruction in the 21st Century are critical if we are to truly address the issue of adolescents that lack the literacy skills they need to be successful in today's world. Literacy is not just the ability to read, write and speak a language, but it is also the ability to compute and solve problems at high levels that will allow students to be able to function in school and employment as well as have an overall satisfaction with life. Literacy promotes development of knowledge and potential, while also encompassing the type of reading that is required for state tests, which includes the ability to make inferences, learn new vocabulary, the ability to link ideas, to identify and summarize the most important ideas of a text and the ability to think about the meaning of what is read in order to be able to answer questions. For those adolescents that arrive in high school without a solid foundation in core reading skills the likelihood of them graduating with a standard diploma is greatly reduced (Hock et al., 2009, p. 33). Without literacy, success is often out of reach.

My search of the literature included multiple data bases such as Academic Search Complete, EBSCO host, and Pro Quest. My search revealed a vast amount of research and public funding designated for early literacy intervention and research, but it appears that the literacy needs of older students has received little attention until the past decade when the struggles of older students has been acknowledged, but still lacks funding designated to address these needs (Lenters, 2006; McCormack & Paratore, 2003; Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Vacca, 2002). There have been

scientific studies that address the literacy levels of early childhood, with citations of such programs as *Beginning to Read* (Adams, 1990), *Preventing Reading Difficulties* (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) and *Starting Out Right* (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999), which will all help to deepen our understanding of what is necessary for young children to be able to learn to read (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998). For example, I found only 40 citations related to technology and adolescent literacy and eight empirical studies that emphasized struggling adolescent readers. Even the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), which requires states to establish and administer rigorous standards for academic achievement, emphasizes elementary and young adolescent literacy by requiring the states to monitor students' progress through annual testing in reading for grades 3-8, and only once in high school (Salinger, 2003, p. 80). While it is acknowledged that literacy skills are vital to academic success across the curriculum, NCLB focuses on reform to improve children's reading skills through the support of grants that emphasize scientific, research-based literacy programs; earmarked for students in kindergarten through third grade, but unfortunately adolescent literacy receives less attention (Camphire, 2005; Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000; Moje, 2002; Salinger, 2003; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008; Vacca, 2002). The topics that are at the center of this literature review are high schools and literacy, school culture, motivation, technology, and literacy as the gateway of life. The culture of the school influences the implementation of in-depth literacy instruction and the motivation of students to improve their literacy skills. It is important to help students see literacy as the gateway of life and prepare for a global world that will require the use of technology combined with highly tuned literacy skills.

High Schools and Literacy

Many high school students struggle to perform at academically proficient levels, which is often attributed to low literacy skills. If we are not able to provide students with the essential skills and knowledge they need to survive in today's technologically complex world the blame for their failure will be placed on the educational system. The skills the students need in today's world go beyond reading and writing and are referred to as the need to be multi-literate, which means being literate not only with paper, but with live and electronic texts" (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 23). It is important that issues related to adolescent literacy and areas of deficit across content areas with emphasis on reading, writing, and thinking skills be addressed in terms of how these issues affect struggling adolescent readers in our high schools.

Performance gaps that represent underachievement are often the focus of data analysis within high schools. . Specifically the gap for each group of students represents the gap between what they can actually do and what they are expected to be able to achieve and perform (Schumaker, Deshler, Woodruff, Hock, Bulgren & Lenz, 2006, p. 64). "The U.S. achievement gap is especially problematic since the current statistics very likely underestimate the problem" (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009, p. 14). Parameters should be defined as to what constitutes achieving below what is expected and how students are identified as struggling readers. Hock et al., 2009, defined proficient and struggling readers in the following manner: "Those who scored at or below the 40th percentile were defined as struggling readers, whereas those who scored above the 40th percentile were defined as proficient readers" (p. 28). They explained the basis for this definition as "The 40th percentile was chosen because students scoring at this mark are almost one third of a standard deviation below the expected mean standard score, and thus below the expectation

set by No Child Left Behind that all children read at grade level” (p.28). It is reported that more than eight million students in grades four through twelve struggle with the reading and writing that is required at the secondary level which includes the material in their textbooks (Gallagher, 2010; Grigg, Daane, Jin & Campbell, 2003; Kamil, 2003; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Sternberg, Kaplan & Borck, 2007).). There is clearly a need to improve adolescent literacy due to the changes and demands on literacy. The focus needs to be on what improvements need to be made to help our students face the challenges they will encounter after they graduate from high school, however, the task of raising reading achievement levels at the secondary level is a very difficult task.

Most high schools identify achievement levels in reading through the use of standardized tests. One of the most reliable reading achievement assessments is the federally sponsored National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Students are tested at grades four, eight and twelve and the national results are posted in the Nation’s Report Card, by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010). The information they post gives a snapshot of the progress of students and it is expected for all students to be at the proficient level, which is supposed to represent solid academic performance, by 2014 according to the No Child Left Behind Act. The 2009 NAEP report indicated that of the students tested, only 38% of twelfth-graders performed at or above the proficient level in reading in 2009, only about two percent higher than in 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, p. 1). According to these results this still leaves 62% of our twelfth grade students performing below the proficient level, which then leads one to question the potential of their success in the 21st century once they are no longer in school.

In 2011 the Nation’s Report Card examined reading results for grades four and eight. These results include the gaps between the tested groups, which are identified in figure 1, and demonstrate the changes in the results from 1992 until 2011. As revealed in figure 1 each group tested has improved from 1992 until 2011 and the gaps are getting smaller, but they are not changing as quickly as might be hoped for, or as quickly as would be needed for all students to be performing at proficient or higher as was mandated by the expectations of NCLB. Snipes and Horwitz (2008) state that over the last decade eighth grade reading performance on the NAEP test has basically remained unchanged (p. 2). The NAEP trends also suggest that over the past thirty years the reading scores for students ages 12 and 17 have changed very little (Grigg, Donahue & Dion, 2007; Perie, Grigg & Donahue, 2005; Perie, Moran & Lutkus, 2005; Persky, Daane & Jin, 2003; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). Schumaker et al.2006, point out that many students entering secondary schools are reading below grade level (p. 64); thus, are not prepared for rigorous study.

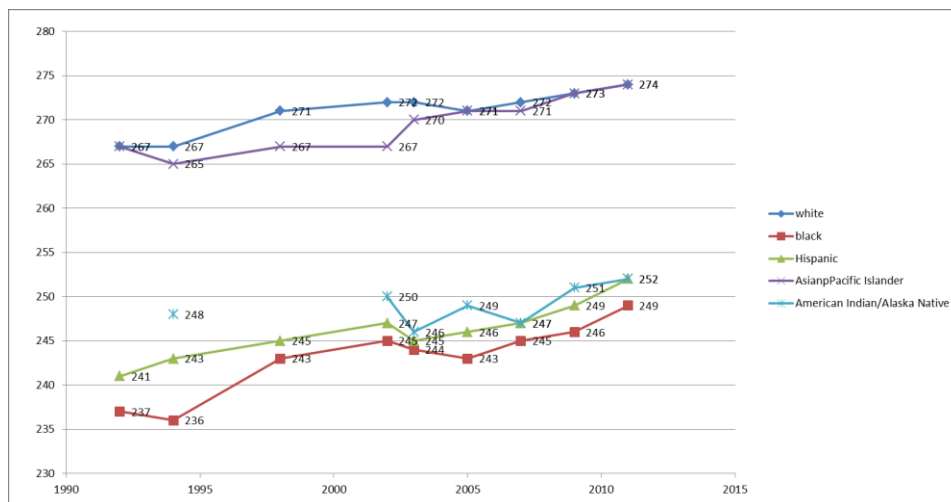


Figure 1

NAEP Reading Test Scores From 1992-2011

Discussions of test scores, or achievement gaps are becoming commonplace. However, “Equitable achievement on relatively low-level state assessments is generally not sufficient in indicating ‘true’ achievement equity when large gaps remain on other, more challenging indicators of student performance” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 272). Some educators believe lower social economic students and those with limited English proficiency as well as students with low ability levels or that lack motivation are unable to meet higher academic standards. The National Institute for Literacy, 2007, stated that “Countless middle and high school students at every socioeconomic level are struggling with learning academic content because they cannot read and write at grade level” (p. 39). It should be the belief of all educators that all students can learn and they should be willing to work at providing all students with strategies to help them find success.

In reading, I have also found that many students will show gains in their reading skills until they reach eighth grade, but that after that point literacy skills may actually decline without further literacy instruction, which is related to the lack of improvement in the development of literacy skills for 12 to 17 year olds in our nation (Anonymous, 2008; Clarke, 2006; Grigg, Donahue & Dion, 2007; Perie, Grigg & Donahue, 2005; Persky, Daane & Jin, 2003; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O’Neal & Cusenbary, 2000). Hock, et al., 2009, points out that “26% percent of eighth-grade students cannot read material essential for daily living, such as road signs, newspapers, or bus schedules” (p. 21). The performance gap continues to grow in later grades when the academic growth of students does not continue to grow, which is evident when over 10 million Americans have reached the 12th grade not even having

learned to read at a basic level since 1983 (Bennett, 1998; Ka, 2004). Without having mastered the reading skills necessary to successfully respond to demanding secondary school requirements or compete for meaningful jobs in the workplace our students will continue to struggle. This just emphasizes why literacy instruction must continue beyond the eighth grade, especially for those who are struggling readers.

Literacy instruction needs to be a goal not only of the building, but also of the district. If literacy is a district vision it will aid in creating a concrete direction for the practice of focusing instruction around literacy. Beyond the vision is the need for data that is used to monitor students' progress and that will hold schools and teachers accountable for implementation and results. This is not so different than the accountability of the schools and teachers for the high stakes testing that are mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. Snipes and Horwitz (2008) states that teachers are encouraged to “develop formative and summative assessments that accurately reflect students' progress toward developing these skills,” which is something that is currently lacking (p. 12). It is clear that the standards are not clear since each state has different standards. It is suggested that it would be simpler if national standards were implemented so that all students would be receiving an education based on the same standards. The International Reading Association has set some benchmarks to use in developing and/or evaluating literacy programs at the secondary level. These benchmarks are as follows:

- Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read.
- Adolescents deserve instruction that builds both the skill and the desire to read increasingly complex materials.
- Adolescents deserve assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them to grow. Adolescents deserve expert teachers who model and

provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum.

- Adolescents deserve reading specialists who assist individual students having difficulty learning to read.
- Adolescents deserve teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics.
- Adolescents deserve homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed. (Rycik & Irvin, 2001, pp. 2-4).

When looking at high school literacy another factor that needs to be taken into consideration includes the configuration of the school day. Typical high school settings are not designed to instruct struggling students to help them acquire the literacy skills they need to comprehend the content knowledge expected since many of the content area teachers do not have the background and training that is needed (Anonymous, 2008; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). As students progress to the secondary level their day typically becomes more segmented into specific content areas, where specific disciplines define the content curriculum (O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008,). A typical schedule consists of six or seven class periods that are about 50 minutes in length. In a 50 minute time period students do not have enough time to close their gaps in literacy (Neuman & Rao, 2004, p. 21). During these 50 minute class periods the knowledge base is divided into specific subject classes, they include a diverse body of students, and the success of the curriculum is based on the amount of content covered during the class time (Boyer, 1983; McLaughlin, Talbert & Bascia, 1990; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). It is this division of knowledge into disciplines that is the construct that supports the secondary curriculum and where teachers and students adopt different pedagogies shaped by each discipline (Ball & Lacey, 1984; Moje, 2002; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Sizer, 1985).

In a typical day these 50 minute classes are very short. The research indicated that a key component for helping struggling readers to become better readers is being able to spend a lot of time with an expert teacher (Fisher & Ivey, 2006; McCormick, 1994; Morris, Ervin, & Conrad, 1996). Having extra time to focus on literacy would be truly beneficial for the struggling readers and their teachers, which is what one school in San Diego addressed by implementing block scheduling to provide substantial amounts of time to address and expose students to reading and writing opportunities and instruction across all content area classes (Fisher & Ivey, 2006, p. 181). Teachers in today's high schools generally feel pressured to cover content quickly, the allocation of extra time to focus on literacy, which is beneficial for older struggling readers, is often not even considered.

Another strategy, besides block scheduling, that is recommended to help improve literacy is 'sustained silent reading', which allows for increased "time to be spent with print and to develop reading habits" (Brozo & Fisher, 2010, p. 74). "Older struggling readers want to know about their world, understand the events around them, and engage with topics on their minds" (Ivey & Fisher, 2006, p. 19). Allowing students time to read things that interest them through extended silent reading time increases the likelihood that more students will be more willing to read and become engaged in what they are reading. Implementing such approaches would again require changes to the traditional 50 minute class schedule. Nonetheless, schools that have succeeded in changing their practices have started with modifying the school structure (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006; Elmore, 2004).

There is clearly a need to improve adolescent literacy due to the changes and demands on literacy skills that will be needed for our students to be more successful citizens in the current, changing world (Hand, 2006, p. 40). The focus needs to be on what

improvements need to be made in our schools to help our students become more literate and able to face the challenges they will encounter after they graduate from high school, however, the task of raising reading achievement levels at the secondary level is a difficult task. As students enter secondary education their level of literacy needs to be at grade level or many will have difficulties comprehending the content driven texts that are used in our schools. Many times we think of students learning to read in elementary levels, but Ivey and Fisher (2006) state “Reading is not a technical skill acquired once and for all in the primary grades but rather a developmental process . . . competence continues to grow through engagement with various types of texts . . .for various purposes over a lifetime” (p. 117). As Gallagher (2010) states one in four students at the secondary level are not able to read and comprehend the material in their textbooks. This is why it is important that teachers instruction to assist students in their understanding of the content being taught.

Traditional high schools are not equipped to integrate literacy instruction across the curriculum or to address the lack of skills the students have (Neuman & Rao, 2004; Wren & Reed, 2005) not only because of the lack of time, but also the lack to expertise of teachers in knowing how to teach literacy. In looking at the ability of the teachers to provide high-quality instruction and to successfully improve the outcomes of their students this must be directly linked to not only the ability of the teachers to effectively teach research-based practices, but to the provision of high quality professional development for the teachers (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006, p. 5). Too often secondary teachers are not trained in literacy, nor does the high school curriculum truly support literacy instruction at the secondary level (Clarke, 2006, p. 66). In terms of the professional development offered for teachers it is often limited both in terms of time and quality (Dole, 2003; Fullan, 1991; Little, 1993; Wren &

Reed, 2005). Many secondary teachers do not feel prepared to address the literacy needs of the struggling students because generally they have not been adequately prepared to address those needs in comparison to elementary teachers (Allen, 2000; Alvermann, 2004; Cziko, 1998; Neuman & Rao, 2004; Wren & Reed, 2005).

Another aspect is that many secondary teachers do not feel that it is their responsibility to teach literacy, but that it is the responsibility of the English teachers, (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Neuman & Rao, 2004) since they have their content to focus on and they see teaching literacy as an additional burden to their already overloaded instructional agenda (Ka, 2004; Neuman & Rao, 2004; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Vacca, 1998). Teachers often feel great pressure to improve test scores due to external pressures such as high stakes testing (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Santa, 2006), to teach large amounts of content (Boyer, 1983; Bullough, 1989; Goodlad, 1984; O'Brien, Springs, & Stith, 2001; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Sizer, 1985), which goes back to how the high school is typically organized by departments and separate subjects. It is due to the pressures that the pace of delivery of the content is controlled (O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995, p. 451). However, it is important that all teachers accept the responsibility for meeting the needs of these struggling readers. Teachers do assume responsibility for helping students to comprehend the texts within their own classroom, but it is important that everyone in the school shares the responsibility for strengthening the literacy skills of the struggling students (Hand, 2006; National Institute for Literacy, 2007).

Teacher quality is important, but equally essential is the quality of the programs in which students are placed (or from which they are excluded). "Though educators would often like to pretend otherwise, there are large variations of quality among different placements

and programs within schools and school districts: (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 269). In *Leadership for Social Justice* it suggests that program equity and “the system of the school and the attitudes, assumptions, and practices of its educators are all largely in the control of the educators, which means that systems can be redesigned and attitudes, assumptions, and practices can be changed so as to create equitable and excellent schools (p. 271). Educational equity is an area that all districts face regardless of location or socioeconomic status. Grey (2008) points out that “the vast chasm between city and suburban schools is but one expression of a society increasingly polarized between a wealthy elite and the rest of the population” (p. 3). It should be our goal to ensure that all students have “access to a rich education that intentionally helps them learn rather than just a privileged few” (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009, p. 18). It should also be our goal to help our struggling readers “to see themselves as thriving readers [who have] the right to expert instruction that treats them as capable and competent, and that helps them to use existing competencies to develop the knowledge, dispositions, and strategies needed for academic and life success” (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009, p. 14).

In looking at teacher quality one aspect that can be considered is the amount of time and effort teachers put forth to help their students. DiPaola and Hoy (2005) sought to identify the relationship between organizational citizenship and achievement in 97 Ohio high schools that included urban, suburban and rural schools. An organizational citizenship behavior scale was administered to teachers and scored using a Likert scale. Achievement was measured by the state proficiency test in mathematics and reading. A significant and positive correlation was found between faculty organizational citizenship behavior and student achievement. DiPaola and Hoy (2005) state:

We theorized that organizational citizenship of a school would impact the achievement of students because teachers in such schools would spontaneously reach out to students and colleagues, exert extra effort, and be more willing to try innovative approaches to curriculum and instruction” (p. 41)

This study’s findings suggest that the key to improving student learning is to find teachers that are willing to exert extra effort, as this organizational behavior will change the school culture to go beyond routine expectations. This clearly demonstrates that if teachers are personally invested in the success of their students and are willing to go the extra mile by working with students on their own time schools are more likely to help their students achieve at a higher level, which can be transferred to any content area, not just literacy.

If we truly want to improve adolescent literacy and achievement levels we must go beyond individual teachers and look at the “leadership demands and school wide structures that must be in place for radical changes to occur” (Ivey & Fisher, 2006, p. 107). Teachers can and do make a difference, but greater changes come when the whole school is involved. This causes one to look at the leadership role within the building. Hallinger, Bickman and Davis (1996) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study of principal leadership and the effects on student learning in 87 Tennessee elementary schools from 1983 to 1986. They used a multidimensional model of principal and teacher questionnaires and student test scores. Also examined were relations between student SES, parental involvement, principal gender, teaching experience, principal instructional leadership, instructional climate, and student reading achievement. Data were analyzed using a structural modeling software program. While this study did not find any significant direct effects on principal leadership and student achievement in reading, there were causal chains that linked principal leadership to student outcomes. The results supported the idea that principals do play an important role

in school effectiveness, but a proper research design should be examined through the use of models that account for effects of the school context on a principal's leadership. The study's findings support the idea that a school's effectiveness is influenced by the principal even if the influence is indirect.

The leadership role of the principal can also affect the direction of school change due to the high stakes testing and accountability pressures by providing support for the teachers so they can meet the needs of all of their students. A case study of principal leadership by Hoppey and McLeskey (2013), using ethnographic and phenomenological methods, examined the role of the principal in school change during the era of high-stakes accountability” This was a yearlong, single case study of a Florida elementary school with approximately 460 students and 27 teachers. Data included interviews, observations, and dialogical or informal conversational interviews with the principal and were analyzed using a bracket method. According to Hoppey and McLeskey (2010), the principal believed that by caring for and being personally invested in his staff provides a setting that demonstrates support of the teachers, which allows them to do their best work, and it demonstrates that the principal trusts and listens to the teachers (pp. 248-9). The principal also stated that he “has deep concerns that high-stakes testing and the overemphasis on narrowly defined accountability measures are demoralizing for teachers, create undue anxiety for the entire school community, and often are not in the best interest of students” (p. 250) and that is why he buffers his teachers from the negative aspects of the accountability system. It was also noted that the principal recognizes the importance of providing high quality professional development for his staff and to provide opportunities for teacher leadership. The study's results point to the need to improve the lives of both teachers and students so they can do

their best work. This is relevant to all schools and their leadership as it is important to make sure that teachers are able to focus on the needs of their students so they can do their best.

School Culture

Academic success is attributed to both literacy and reading. According to Rotherham and Willingham (2009) the skills our students will need in the 21st century are not new (p. 16). It is suggested that we need to teach students not to just be able to read, but to think. Roberts and Billings (2008) state that teaching thinking should be treated as a fundamental literacy skill. “By teaching students to think, we prepare them not only for employment and citizenship, but also for leading abundant lives” (Roberts & Billings, 2008, p. 36). “Literacy demands have increased and changed as the technological capabilities of our society have expanded and been made widely available; concomitantly, the need for flexible, self-regulated individuals who can respond to rapidly changing contexts has also increased” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 9). In order to be strategic and flexible in our changing world all students must learn how to apply their skills to ever changing situations. Students need to obtain reading skills that go beyond decoding. They need to include being able to critically analyze texts and contexts, to be able to make inferences and take informed actions. Students cannot learn from books that they cannot read. “Improving reading . . . can be a victory for everyone involved. To meet state mandates and pass standardized tests in any subject area . . . young people must be able to read key materials fluently, skillfully, strategically, and critically” (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 17).

It is the culture of our schools that will make a difference in the achievement levels of our students. According to Deshler, Hock and Catts (2006) “the climate that exists within secondary schools needs to be conducive to student learning” (p. 4). Teachers must “treat

students as capable thinkers, readers, and writers who expect to take risks, solve problems, and reflect on their learning (McConachie et al., 2006, p. 13). The culture of the school is a direct reflection on the teachers' attitudes towards the students and their abilities. Tovani (2010) states "beliefs affect effort – and effort affects success . . . expressing belief in someone's ability is powerful" (p. 26). The culture of the school then is dependent on the administration and the teachers to set the tone for the expectations and the setting that will encourage the students to take risks and to strive to be successful.

Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston and Smith (1979) focused on school climate over a three year period in 12 schools that served London's inner city population. Their research included four assessments that consisted of characteristics measured at the time students entered secondary school, measurements of social organization of the schools and the types of learning environments that were provided for the students, assessment of student performance in regards to attainment and behavior, and an examination of environmental factors to determine if there were any associations with various outcomes. The data were collected through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and examination of records covering a two year period of time. Researchers found a causal relationship with the four measurements of student outcomes. "In other words, to an appreciable extent children's behavior and attitudes were shaped and influenced by their experiences at school and, in particular, by the quality of the school as a social institution" (Rutter et al., 1979, p. 179). Limitations of the study were the need to consider the leadership style of the building administrator, the school curriculum, or parental and community involvement. Too much emphasis was placed on the possible causal relationship between school processes and student progress and that a controlled, experimental study would be needed in order to verify

the causality of this relationship (Rutter et al., 1979). The study suggests that schools are not the most important factor impacting the students' development, but that they are a major influence.

The culture of the school is important to the success of the students. To accelerate the learning of low-achievers Perkins-Gough (2006) identified practices that made a difference, particularly among students who “. . . arrive in high school lagging far behind their peers” (p. 88). They studied four high schools from 2004-2005, identified as “exceptionally successful at improving the performance of struggling students” (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 88) and that served a large number of low-income students who had all scored at least average on the state's math and reading assessments. The students who began high school the furthest behind their peers from all of these schools made greater than expected gains on the state assessments. Data included extensive classroom observations, focus groups, including both students and teachers, surveys taken by administrators, teachers and students, and the researchers also collected data and materials pertaining to schedules, transcripts, and assignments. Researchers compared the results to three schools that were similar demographically and that were producing more typical results with their struggling students. Significant differences were found in the practices between these two sets of schools in the areas of culture, academic core, support, teachers, time and other resources (Perkins-Gough, 2006, pp. 88-89).

In the study, as noted by Perkins-Gough (2006), all of the high-impact high schools had a culture of high expectations. These schools “focused on academics; school practices were geared toward preparing students for college and careers; and teachers and administrators consistently stressed achievement” (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 88). In contrast

the comparison schools focus centered on simply enabling students to graduate, rules, the attitudes of their teachers, and their standards were ‘lukewarm’ (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 88).

Additionally, the high-impact schools had a strong academic core, educators took responsibility for helping all students to succeed and “removed barriers to high-level courses and encouraged students to take on academic challenges” (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 88).

According to Perkins-Gough (2006) the data were also used by the high-impact schools to aid in planning for the future and for improving curriculum, while the lower achieving schools only used data to measure past performance of their students and in order for their students to access the more challenging courses they had to ‘jump more hurdles’ (p. 88).

The third significant difference found in the study was the support given by both sets of schools that was provided to the students who began to fall behind their peers in 9th grade, which included extra instruction in both English and math. However, in the high-impact schools the study found they provided the help in a way that kept their students on track with college-preparatory requirements, they identified struggling students and required them to get the help they needed (Perkins-Gough, 2006, pp. 88-89). The high-impact schools’ counselors helped with the monitoring of the student performance and to make arrangements to get the help these students needed. In contrast, the average-impact schools would also offer the students extra help, but they made it optional for their students. The average-impact schools or comparison schools would also provide remedial help, but not until after the students had already fallen behind, and the extra help they provided was in such a way that students were delayed entry into grade level courses (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 89).

The fourth significant difference, according to Perkins-Gough (2006), this study identified pertained to teacher assignments. In the high-impact schools the assignments for

teachers were made according to the needs of the students, not seniority, while the average achieving schools allowed staff seniority and teacher preferences to determine the teaching assignments. The high-impact schools also provided support for new teachers that focused on the instruction and curriculum, while the comparison schools support tended to be more personal and social. Another difference found was in regards to class sizes. The high-impact schools ensured that the struggling students were in smaller classes, even if it meant that other classes with non-struggling students had higher numbers, while the comparison schools' class sizes were more uniform. Teacher hiring practices were also noted as being different between these two groups as the high-impact schools' principals had more control over the teachers they hired than at the comparison schools.

The last difference noted in this study was time and resources. Instructional time and other resources were used more efficiently and deliberately in the high-impact schools. According to the study the high-impact schools made sure that students entering the 9th grade lagging behind their peers spent more time in 'college-prep' courses while in the lower achieving set of schools the struggling students were often found in 'support' or "remedial' courses (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 89). The study conducted by the Education Trust concluded that the practices of both sets of schools had many distinctions, even though some were subtle. The report also noted that some of the distinctions were fragile as they reported that one of the high-impact schools declined in their status the following school year, which was attributed to the possible loss of key staff members (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 89). The researchers of the study hope that the shared practices of the high-impact schools would be acknowledge by schools that want to accelerate the learning of their below-grade-level students (Perkins-Gough, 2006, p. 89).

In creating a culture that promotes literacy every content area teacher can have a positive influence on increasing the literacy levels of their students, but the commitment to the effort must be school wide. Unfortunately many of our content teachers lack the training and resources necessary for effective literacy instruction and many feel that teaching reading is not in their job description (Clarke, 2006; Dole, 2003; Neuman & Rao, 2004; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Wren & Reed, 2005), however, it is the responsibility of all in a building to attend to the needs and learning of their students (National Institute for Literacy, 2007, p. 1). The culture of a school is often thought of as being safe and orderly, but it also needs a set of norms and values that everyone's attention is focused on, that everyone knows what is most important and that they are motivated to work hard towards that common purpose (Jerald, 2006, p. 2). The culture needs to include positive relationships and classrooms need to be communities where students feel connected, because where they feel comfortable they achieve higher and interact more with peers and their teachers (Santa, 2006; Wolk, 2003). Adolescents experience a lot of chaos in their lives and that is why they need predictable structure, especially in their classrooms where instructional routines not only add a sense of order and security, but the students tend to do better academically in a structured environment (Santa, 2006; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993) The climate must be conducive to student learning (Deshler, Hock & Catts, 2006; Jerald, 2006), which includes classroom management systems and quality instruction so focused learning can occur (Deshler, Hock & Catts, 2006; Sprick, 2006).

Another aspect of the school culture is the expectations, especially the expectations of the teachers for their students, but particularly for their struggling students. Do our expectations about struggling readers give them permission to give up? Tovani (2010) states

that “it’s no wonder that by high school, they have often given up on themselves” (p. 26). “We have inadvertently given many struggling readers the message that no one believes they can or will read in school. Our low expectations give students an excuse to opt out of improving” (Tovani, 2010, p. 26). “They melt into the background until the challenge passes” (Tovani, 2010, p. 27) or they may avoid reading (Brozo, 1991; Hall, 2006; Johnston & Winograd, 1985). Struggling readers often have little confidence in their reading abilities (Collins, 1996; Wallace 1995). If we want struggling readers to take a risk then we have to encourage them and show them that we have confidence in their abilities. Struggling learners tend to shut down with frustration. To raise expectations it will require changes in the beliefs of our teachers and our students and the expectation is that everyone will have to work harder, but that achievement levels should improve.

Educators have to remember that the culture of the school can shape the way our students see themselves and it can affect their learning. This is reaffirmed through the words of Stover (2003) when she explains why students find reading difficult or insignificant, stating that the student lacks “appropriate skills, motivation, time, interest, or trust in the educational system; or they just might not like school, the teacher, or the way a textbook makes them feel inconsequential and dumb” (p. 7). Educators have made our students aware of their literacy shortcomings through the increased focus on standardized testing and “we have identified struggling readers as early as 1st grade and have shared with them the cold, hard truth about our perception of their abilities” (Tovani, 2010, p. 26). When students become aware of their inability to be successful academically they may experience low self-esteem, a lack of motivation, and disinterest in school (Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Salinger, 2003; Torgesen, 1982). If we want students to be more engaged in their learning

and have higher achievement levels then they need to have a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence in their abilities (Guthrie, 2004; Santa, 2006).

Self-efficacy and achievement were factors found in a study by Choi (2005), who specifically looked at self-efficacy and self-concept as predictors of academic performance for college students. This was a quantitative multiple regression study that included 230 college students, enrolled in general education courses. All of the participants were volunteers and the study was focused on determining if academic grades were related to self-efficacy and self-concept. The study's participants completed demographic information, and both self-efficacy and self-concepts measures. The findings indicated that both academic self-concept and specific self-concept were significant predictors of term grades. Students who had a higher degree of self-percepts tended to achieve higher grades, academic achievement is influenced by the classroom learning environment. Choi (2005) stated "When students experience successes through completing various course activities arranged at increasing difficulty levels, they will be more likely to experience increased self-efficacy and self-concept, which, in turn, serve to improve college students' academic achievement" (p. 204). Implications of these findings suggest that if high school students have higher levels of self-efficacy their achievement levels could be expected to be higher.

There is evidence that after elementary school reading levels tend to decline, especially for struggling readers (Eccles, et al., 1993; McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). The decline in reading for struggling readers may be due to difficulties such as a lack fluency, reading slowly and often having to stop to sound out words (Deschler, Hock, & Catts, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins, 2001; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Thomas & Wexler, 2007), or because they are unable to

comprehend what they read (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Kamil, 2003; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). Other problems they may encounter might include a lack of vocabulary, a lack of reading strategies, or the inability to apply reading strategies to the different kinds of text they encounter across content areas (Kemple, Corrin, Nelson, Salinger, Herrmann & Drummond, 2008; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). The lack of reading for adolescents can also be attributed to simply a lack of interest in reading (Bintz, 1993; Elkins & Luke, 1999; Lenters, 2006, p. 136), whether it be a lack of skills or a lack of motivation the fact is that students are reading less.

Struggling readers are often also referred to as reluctant readers since many see reading as a forced activity and therefore become reluctant to read. It is known that to become a better reader you have to read frequently, which is one of the reasons for implementing sustained silent reading programs, but also giving students choices about what they want to read can help to motivate them to read independently (Clarke, 2006. p. 67). Motivation is closely aligned with achievement; but for these to be effective instruction and materials need to be engaging or as cautioned by Guthrie (1996):

When children read merely to complete an assignment, with no sense of involvement or curiosity, they are being compliant. They conform to the demands of the situation irrespective of their personal goals. Compliant students are not likely to become lifelong learner. (p. 433)

It is important that we use interesting reading materials (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999) and that we focus on their personal interests through the use of diverse reading materials and even digital texts (Alvermann, 2002). Lenters (2006) states “reading itself was not the reason for their resistance” (p. 137), but that some chose to not read because the text was too difficult to read and understand or because they had no

interest in the reading materials (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006; Guthrie, et al., 2004). Ivey and Fisher, 2006, state “Older struggling readers want to know about their world, understand the events around them, and engage with topics on their minds” (p. 19). If we hope to lessen adolescent resistance to reading then we need to bridge “students’ out-of-school literacies with in-school literacies” (Lenters, 2006, p. 140). We know that students use literacy outside of school through e-mail, text messages, graffiti and notes to friends all of which students are writing, reading and communicating, but not in what is seemed to be looked at as acceptable topics and writing styles for schools. This is also referred to as discourse, which can be seen when a student tells a teacher a story compared to the language the student uses when telling the same story to a friend. In both instances the student is demonstrating literacy, but we need to find a way to build a bridge to connect their literacy fluency outside of school to inside of school.

While it is acknowledged that students can and do exhibit literacy fluency outside of school, providing resources that will engage them in school can be difficult because the availability of the kinds of materials students wish to read may be limited, whether it is due to a lack of resources or because of the content that is not appropriate for schools (Phelps, 2005, p. 4). Moje (2000) examined social, cultural and linguistic variables in adolescent literacy that s could be useful or problematic in schools. The researcher, using case study, collected data over a three year period on five students in grades seven through nine that identified themselves as associate or fringe gang members. These students communicated their gang affiliations through written, oral and body discourses. Moje, 2000, described these discourses as “language and literacy practices . . . are communicative and transformative in the sense that they are used to make and represent meanings, to change or construct

identities, and to gain or maintain social positions in a particular social space” (p. 670). It was noted that even though these discourses involved sophistication there was no place in literacy practices within schools for gang-related content. While Moje advocates the engagement of students in studying problems and issues that are important to them, as well as being able to discuss these topics with their peers, she does recognize the difficulties there would be if ‘gangsta’ literacies were introduced into the classroom. In contrast to these findings, Phelps (2005) notes these discourses could be useful in that “Effective literacy instruction for adolescents must be designed to accommodate a wide range of individual differences, interests, and literacies. Instruction should also be responsive to the diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of adolescents” (p. 26).

Creating a school culture that promotes growth and achievement must focus on “student goal setting, holding students accountable for achieving outcome goals, good habits of learning, high expectations for each student, and personalized, respectful, caring interactions between teachers and students” (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006, p. 5). The culture of the school is argued as being the foundation for school improvement. This view is summarized by Purkey and Smith (1982):

We have argued that an academically effective school is distinguished by its culture: a structure, process, and climate of values and norms, that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning . . . The logic of the cultural model is such that it points to increasing the organizational effectiveness of a school building and is neither grade-level nor curriculum specific. (p. 68)

Educators must also recognize the importance of developing literacy outside of school and begin to include learning that takes place outside of school in the school’s curriculum. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement conducts a regular

cycle of studies on children's literacy abilities around the world and the study conducted by Lam, Cheung, and Lam (2009) was specifically designed to measure trends in reading achievement for Hong Kong Primary students compared to students in developed countries. Assessments were given in 2001 and 2006 in more than fifty countries and questionnaires were administered. The Hong Kong participants totaled 144 schools with a total of 4,613 student participants. The study's findings suggested that poor families tended to leave the teaching of reading to the schools, most students' attitudes toward reading were positive, and the increased usage of computers aided in honing reading skills and acquiring techniques for identifying information relevant to printed text. The researchers also found that from 2001 to 2006 the number of students who read materials outside of school increased, including increased levels of parental engagement in reading activities at home. In 2006 more parents engaged in activities at home that included reading books to their children, telling stories, singing songs and playing word games, all of which smoothed the child's entry into primary school. It was clear that the involvement of the parents and reading outside of school were important factors. While the expectation is often for the school to teach the students how to read, the involvement of the parents plays a huge role in the learning environment and the level of expectations. The culture of the school is more than providing a safe learning environment it also affects our students' achievement levels, their motivation, and the overall learning outcomes of the students.

Motivation

Struggling readers often have little confidence, become reluctant readers and have low motivation for learning. So the question of what motivates students to read and to want to learn comes to mind. There are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Thinking

back to when I was in school the main motivator was intrinsic, the inner desire to do well. It seems that now more extrinsic motivators are used, such as rewards. It is clear that good readers tend to be intrinsically motivated to read and that they spend time outside of school reading for pleasure, which is time spent practicing their reading skills. Reed (2005) states “The amount of time they spend reading is highly correlated with their reading proficiency and overall academic success across all subject areas” (p. 14). The key to their success thus seems to be tied to their intrinsic motivation to read independently. Typically adolescent readers who struggle with literacy are not motivated to engage in academic reading, much less reading on their own for pleasure (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey, 1999; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Snow & Moje, 2010). These struggling readers often attribute their reading failure to environmental factors instead of their own deficiencies in their reading abilities. For some reason there is also a trend that is debilitating in “which middle school becomes a point at which learning how to get by without reading can take precedence over learning to be a better reader” (Lenters, 2006, p. 142).

So again, the question of how to motivate these struggling readers to want to read comes to mind. Reed, 2005, notes “What motivates students to spend a lot of time reading are the same things that motivate people everywhere to engage in certain behaviors: They see a real-world value in the behavior, it provides pleasure, it is a means to a worthy end, or all three (p. 16). All of these can be perceived as payoffs, which both students and teachers use to set their level of engagement (Cusick, 1983; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986).

Guthrie, Coddington and Wigfield (2009) investigated the motivations of 245 fifth-grade students, who were African American and Caucasian, from three schools in a small

town in a mid-Atlantic state who may experience diverse cultural, social, and academic environments (p. 320). Guthrie et al. (2009) stated that these students that are more positively motivated believe in their competence, they are intrinsically motivated to learn, and they have clear goals for achievement (p. 321). This study used a theoretical framework of multiple goals in motivation while investigating aspects of motivation that contribute to positive achievement motivation in students and aspects that reduce or undermine their motivation in reading (Guthrie et al., 2009, p. 322). Various types of readers were identified. The first group was avid readers, students who enjoyed reading in and out of school and did not avoid reading; the second group was ambivalent readers, who possessed intrinsic motivation, but only for some texts; the third group was apathetic readers, which are students who have low intrinsic motivation for reading and are uninterested or alienated from school learning; and the last group was averse readers, students who have low intrinsic motivation and have high avoidant reading motivations (Guthrie et al., 2009, pp. 325-327).

Major findings were that both affirming and undermining motivations associated with reading achievement for both groups of students were found. Avoidance motivation was more strongly associated with the achievement for African American students than the Caucasian students. This did not mean that the African American students were more avoidant since both groups were the same in the level of avoidance. There was a continuum of avoidance. Students that reported high amounts of avoidance would intentionally try to get out of reading books for school. At the other end of the continuum of avoidance, the students were deliberately non-avoidant, meaning they had every intention of reading the materials for school regardless of the difficulty or even if they dislike the content. In regards to intrinsic values the study stated that the Caucasian students had relatively stronger intrinsic

motivations (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009, p. 346). While this study was not designed for secondary students, the authors gave reasons why secondary students might avoid reading, which included that the texts were irrelevant to their lives and therefore meaningless since they could not relate to them personally (Guthrie et al., 2009, p. 323). The authors discussed how for these low achieving students they may not be unmotivated, but they may be actively avoiding reading tasks (Guthrie et al., 2009, p. 344). A limitation of the study cited by the authors was that it was difficult to determine whether the performance of these fifth grade students in reading was determined by motivation or if the students' motivation was determined by their reading performance (Guthrie et al., 2009, p. 345).

This leads to the synthesis that readers' motivation has multiple facets including individual goals (Mosenthal, 1999; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Pintrick & Schunk, 1996; ; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001) and that their self-efficacy, the belief in being able to be successful (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O'Neil, & Cusenbary, 2000; Wigfield, 2004; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), is directly relate to literacy for adolescents and their levels of engagement. Hall (2006) states that "students who feel they cannot accomplish an academic task may be less motivated to engage with it" (p. 425). Whithear (2009) states "even a skilled reader will not progress if they are not motivated or engaged with their learning" (p. 37). A scenario provided by Snow and Biancarosa (2003) is insightful:

Most of us, though, find we read with greater comprehension when the topic interests us, when we have background knowledge to bear, and when we understand the purpose and expectations for a specific reading task. The struggling adolescent reader, so familiar to teachers, very often shows a high degree of variation in reading ability, doing quite well with some materials but particularly badly with content area texts. (p. 6)

As mentioned, motivation involves self-efficacy, but by the time students are in high school they often have little confidence in their own ability to be successful.

Self-efficacy and engagement are two facets of motivation that must be attended to if the intention is to increase the achievement levels of adolescents' literacy. Santa, 2006, recommends to “focus on the need for greater student engagement and motivation as well as more opportunities for students to work together in small collaborative groups interacting with one another around a text” (p. 469). Santa goes on to state that if we want our students to make the efforts to be successful, they need to be able to connect to their teachers. If the students have no confidence in themselves they will become disengaged as learners.

The connection to teachers as Santa (2006) mentioned as the principal motivator was also reiterated in a study by Wentzel (1997) that focused on social and academic outcomes in middle school. The three year longitudinal study of 248 participants, grades 6th to 8th, sought to provide evidence that teachers provide care and support and their actions are related to student outcomes. Survey data were collected in the spring to gather students' perceptions of teacher caring and achievement data were obtained from the students' files at the end of their sixth-grade academic year. Wentzel (1997) said “The results of the present study, however, suggest that models of motivation based on psychological or instructional variables be extended to include students' perceptions of relationships with others, especially perceptions that teachers care about them” (p. 416-417). The researcher indicated that students who are well liked by teachers are highly motivated to achieve academically (p. 417). Students are more motivated to strive to achieve in order to please the teacher. Even though this study was conducted in a middle school, the notion of caring teachers can be

applied at the secondary level. For many people the desire to please those who care about us, or to make them proud of us, can affect our actions and be a motivating factor.

It is not just the engagement, as an act, but the materials that will entice the students to want to read that make a difference. Research suggests that if teachers use other resources, not just textbooks, that they are likely to provide more engaging material to peak the interests of students; older struggling readers want to know about their world and the events that surround their lives, but may lack the ability to read about these on their own. It often takes a teacher breaking down the information to aid students in their understanding, however, engaging students in discussions about these topics will peak interests even of struggling readers. This is why the aim should be at using instructional strategies that will aid in increasing students' interests and motivations, especially since research suggests that student motivation is important in the success of literacy instruction. One key to improving students' reading skills is to hook them on literature; reading materials do not always have to be text books, but it is important that teachers use challenging materials and topics of interest to garner participation. Another strategy that has shown increased students' understanding by 19 percentile points, according to Marzano (2010), is using summarizing strategies (p. 83). More importantly, is "when students experience success each day, they will take the risks they need to take in order to learn"(Tovani, 2010, p. 29). Literacy interventions, or strategies, need to be provided throughout the education of students. "School systems cannot afford to wait for deficits to accumulate to start providing additional supports for struggling readers" (Snipes, 2008, p. 9). Regardless of how many strategies are suggested a key element to raising achievement is allocating sufficient time that is dedicated to reading instruction, especially for those students who are well below grade level. Instruction combined with

curriculum that is “rich in content and oriented toward the sophisticated thinking of adolescents will result in higher degrees of motivation” (Fisher, 2008, p.37).

The school experience for students since No Child Left Behind became law “has been shaped by test preparation” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 36). There are many reasons educators cite for the decline of reading: poverty, lack of parent education, print-poor environments at home, second-language issues, the over-scheduling of children, and competition from electronic media (Gallagher, 2010, p. 37). However, reading needs to be brought into students’ lives as pleasurable; yet, our current curricula often bring little joy. Texts that will help to engage students to read will help them to read more frequently; which, in turn, are related to positive outcomes including reading achievement (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Reed, Schallert, Beth, & Woodruff, 2004; Wigfield, 2004). The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) reveal that “students that read for fun have higher reading scores than students who rarely read for enjoyment” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 40). Students need time that is specifically designated for leisure reading, where they are able to choose the reading materials. As previously stated, if students relate to the topic or has an interest in learning about a specific topic then they are more likely to read without being forced.

With the pressures of high stakes testing the format many teachers utilize to convey the vast amount of content they have to cover in a short period of time often includes handouts, condensed reading passages, or lectures to convey information rather than spending time to attend to the more significant literacy needs of some young people (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009, p.5). Because of the amount of the content being covered and the pace the information is being delivered many of our young people depend on the teacher for understanding of the text, which allows them to avoid reading altogether. While

older struggling readers would benefit from extra time to focus on literacy, their needs are also dependent on their teachers learning specific instructional strategies through professional development that implement daily independent reading time and a schedule that provides reading and writing opportunities in all content area classes. Concerns that secondary content teachers have in regards to their past experiences with reading in their classroom, include the following:

1. Students do not perceive reading as meaningful.
2. They do not value the act or process of reading.
3. Teachers feel frustrated about how to teach.
4. High-stakes assessments exacerbate the problem. (Ka, 2004, p. 2)

It does not matter where the blame is laid for why students are not proficient readers, more important is the evidence that many high school students might not be ready for the academic and real-world literacy demands that they will be faced with in their future. Many also are not motivated by their teachers and need more strategies and instruction to help them to find more success.

Reading is more than decoding (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 22) and it uses many different strategies, such as thinking strategies, but it also must have background knowledge to build upon when introducing new information. According to Tovani (2010) a factor that affects readers' abilities to understand the texts that they read include background knowledge, motivation and purpose. (p. 28). Good interventions can make a difference. A variety of strategies that teachers can use include anticipatory activities, questioning, note taking, graphic organizers, vocabulary instruction, reciprocal teaching, pre-reading strategies, connections to prior knowledge and prediction. It is also suggested that textbooks are not enough, but that we need to infuse our teaching with "authentic, real-world nonfiction- the

kind of informational, expository, persuasive texts that adults really read” (Curtis & Longo, 1999, p. 47). Roberts and Billings (2008) affirm that “To teach the process and product of thinking is to recognize the profound relationship between thought and language . . . we should treat it as a fundamental literacy skill” (p. 33). As these skills are taught and students gain confidence it will be easier to motivate them because they will see themselves as being able to do the tasks requested of them. “When adolescents have experienced years of failure and frustration, keeping them motivated requires that they see their progress immediately and on a regular basis” (Curtis & Longo, 1999, p. 43).

In order to motivate our students to read adolescent literacy theorists and researchers are faced with the question of “how to connect youths’ out-of-school literacies and cultural practices, which appear to be highly motivating and an important resource for their in-school meaning making, to their in-school literacy learning in various content areas” (Moje, 2002, p. 224). Moje (2002) states that “literacy educators do not know as much as we could about how to develop curricula and pedagogy that can support the academic literacy learning of your people by drawing on the literacies they skillfully practice in everyday life” (p. 224). Our youth do use literacies every day in many different contexts to make sense of their everyday lives, but these literacies are not the norms we expect them to use in school. Educators know that adolescents’ interests are connected to the internet, hypermedia and other interactive technological communications. Everyday literacy practices are changing, which is why for teachers the perspective of using critical literacy is important. According to Alvermann (2001) the implications of the perspective of critical literacy might instructionally translate into purposes such as:

- To motivate students to explore the assumptions that authors/video artists/web page designers/cartoonists, and so on may have been operating under when constructing their messages.
- To facilitate students' thinking about the decisions computer users in chat rooms make (and why) when it comes to choice of words, content, topics included (or excluded), and interests served.
- To encourage multiple readings of the same text from different perspectives (e.g., an ecology text on water resources read from the perspectives of a scientist, a swimmer, a shrimp boat captain, a homeowner, a Green Peace activist, and a politician). (p. 199)

Ivey and Fisher (2006) provide several reasons for students' reading difficulties which include that grade-level textbooks are typically too hard for struggling readers, repeated failure results in a loss of motivation for students, and they often feel helpless to improve. The authors also refer to the importance of including relevant texts that focus on the interests' of the students if we want to engage these students. Regardless of what educators do to try to motivate students the students' self-perceptions are extremely important.

Greenleaf and Hinchman (2009) state:

To come to see themselves as thriving readers, young people who struggle with reading have a right to expert instruction that treats them as capable and competent, and that helps them to use existing competencies to develop the knowledge, dispositions, and strategies needed for academic and life success. (p. 12)

If we treat our struggling readers differently, then we are doing as Beers (2009) states "segregation by intellectual rigor, something every bit as shameful and harmful as segregation by color" (p.3), which is essentially segregating these students and further affecting their self-efficacy and motivation.

Technology

While reading performance and the amount of voluntary reading has declined during the last two decades the use of new digital media is on the rise. Much of the information that is now available is quickly accessed, as our digital culture provides us with immediacy and

speed. Cookson (2009) even suggests “A new electronic learning environment is replacing the linear, text-bound culture of conventional school” (p. 12). It is not only the tools that are changing literacy, but the definition of literacy is also changing. Compaine (1983) referred to being literate in the late eleventh century you had to be able to ‘compose and recite orally,’ while modern literacy, which consist of reading and writing, did not become widespread in England until the mid-nineteenth century (pp. 130-1311). Today, many people automatically define being literate as being able to read and write and that is the standard that they use for all forms of literacy past, present and future. It is now that technology is rapidly changing this paradigm as Hill (2009) states, “Reading is no longer merely about what’s on the page, but also what’s on the screen” (p. 111), which leads to the question that is being debated regarding whether or not reading on a computer embodies our understanding of literacy.

The speed of change in our technology is affecting not only how our students are learning, but the jobs that they will someday be doing. Possibly one of the greatest influences on life in the 21st century may be the Internet. Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, and Everett-Cacopardo, (2009), state the speed of change due to the internet is amazing since there are more than 1.5 billion people who use the internet (p. 264). They go on to point out that at the current usage rate that by 2016 more than half of the world’s population will be online and within another three to eight years later that most of the world will be online (Lue et al., 2009, p. 264). It is through the internet that we are linked to the greatest supply of information ever in civilization’s history (Leu, et al., 2009; Weare & Lin, 2000). The internet is also considered to be the most efficient system for delivering new technologies to read, write and communicate in ways that allow individuals to construct new information, knowledge and technologies (Lanksher & Knobel, 2006; Leu, et al., 2009), however,

determining the validity of this vast amount of information now rests on the consumer and it is critical that the skills needed to evaluate and expose the information is critical to success (Warlick, 2004, p. 40).

Students online lives are typically connected to the ‘Internet’ and it is the changes and the usages of the Internet and the skills that are required that are creating the issue of educators needing to infuse and teach adolescents the skills that will help them to become more literate online (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Hill, 2009; Leu, 2000; Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009). Many are well aware that the internet provides social practices for adolescents where they read, write and communicate (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Leander, 2008; Leu et al., 2009; Street, 2003), which because of the widespread use of the Internet and other technologies by adolescents is why it is important to revisit how we define literacy, as reading is shifting from page to screen. This brings up the question what does literacy in the 21st century look like? Warlick (2004) redefined basic literacy as contemporary literacy (p. 17). Warlick (2004) also states “It reaffirms the essence and vital importance of reading, writing, and basic mathematics, but refines them within the context of an information environment that is: digital, global, indexed, hyper-organized, multimedia, ubiquitous; and a future political, economic, and personal experience that is largely driven by that information” (p. 17). We need to keep in mind that nothing is going to change the fact that young people will continue to read online.

Wolf and Barzillai (2009) state “the digital culture may radically change how we learn to read and acquire information. And they may well change how we think” (p. 33). According to Wolf and Barzillai (2009), Socrates cautioned against learning to read as “he believed that literacy could alter the kind of memory and probative processes required for the

young to deeply pursue and internalize knowledge” (p. 33). Socrates worried that young people would believe what they read as truth rather than searching for the truth, which is what has been suggested in that the digital medium might have similar issues for our young learners. Just because the students can locate information quickly on the web does not mean that they truly understand the information, nor that the information is factual. “This great gift of easily accessible, readily available, rich information has the potential to form a more passive and an even more easily ‘deluded’ learner” (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009, p. 35). There is no argument that the digital culture has changed how we learn to read and acquire information and that it may even change how we think. Many of our struggling readers use the digital information systems to help them find sources quickly and without a lot of output or reading on their part. Is the information too easily accessible? This is a question that as educators we must consider as we attempt to encourage struggling readers to utilize resources that will help to entice them to read. Deshler, Hock and Catts (2006) state “Our world has become flattened because the Internet has enabled people, regardless of their location or status in life, to share their ideas and engage others on a playing field that has been leveled (flattened) by innovations associated with technology” (p. 1). They go on to state that if individuals cannot read well that much of the knowledge will be beyond them. Hill (2009) points out that internet literacy has to have a new set of skills in order for the students to comprehend the information, which include locating, synthesizing and communicating, such skills go beyond what is learned from just reading a book (p. 113). Due to the rapidly changing technological environment that requires more skillful reading, there must be an understanding of the difference between just communicating what is read online and comprehending what one has read.

If students want to be able to compete in a global economy then they must develop skills and knowledge that include “the ability to read, comprehend, and apply knowledge to novel learning situations” (Deshler, Hock & Catts, 2006, p. 1). The skills that jobs in the 21st century require are markedly different. While “Google has given us the world at our fingertips . . . speed and ubiquity are not the same as actually *knowing* something” (Cookson, 2009, p. 8). Many of our students are reading fewer books and surfing the Web for information, which makes the information that is now available quickly accessed, as our digital culture provides us with immediacy and speed, but our students are often unable to evaluate whether the information is useful or distracting. Students need to obtain reading skills that go beyond decoding. They need to include being able to critically analyze texts and contexts, to be able to make inferences and take informed actions. The internet skills that will be necessary for these adolescents in the 21st century include the ability to not just read and comprehend the text in front of them, but more importantly to be able to find, decode, evaluate and organize information digitally (Armstrong & Warlick, 2004; Warlick, 2004). With the shift to more online reading, how to measure the level of comprehension becomes a problem for educators. Interestingly, NCLB requires that all students be technologically literate by the eighth grade, but states have not developed assessments to assess the level of comprehension for online reading (Hill, 2009; Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009). Students will still need to be able to use basic math skills just as writing will continue to be a skill for all students since information is often most effectively communicated through text (Armstrong & Warlick, 2004, pp. 24, 26).

It has also been suggested that while the digital information presents both richness and new challenges to our readers, both visually and verbally, it is also a potentially great

distraction, while requiring the reader to understand how to evaluate and make meaning of the information. With literacy demands increasing and changing, the need for our students to become more flexible, self-regulated learners who can respond to rapidly changing contexts has also increased (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 9). In order to be strategic and flexible in our changing world, the skills our students need extend beyond basic reading and writing; and educators must begin by seeing a partnership between reading and technology (Hill, 2009, p. 113).

There is an overabundance of information, according to Breivik (2005) that bombards our students from the time they turn on their television in the morning until they shut off their computers at bedtime. This abundance of information includes cell phones, chat rooms, e-mails, and the internet to name a few sources. However, Breivik (2005) states that “neither all of this information, nor their ease with the computers and Internet that bring much of it to them, are translating into better-educated and informed college graduates or more competent and efficient workers” (p. 22). “We are drowning in information, but starved for knowledge” (Naisbitt, 1982, p. 24). Our students are less prepared to do research, and the information they quickly obtain lead to the need of skills of critical consumer literacy, which are the skills needed “to test the reliability, currency, and relevance of the information they find” (Breivik, 2006, p. 22). This is also referred to as information literacy, essential for the 21st century. Because of the increased technology it is easily agreed upon that schools and teachers must change (Hill, 2009; King-Sears, Swanson, & Mainzer, 2011; Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009), but computer skills, which will continue to be essential, should not be viewed as replacing existing literacy skills, but as additional skills needed.

It is important to consider the attitudes and confidence that students experience when being faced with the use of technology. Hasan (2003) conducted a study related to computer self-efficacy using a survey questionnaire to assess the 151 participants' confidence in their computing skills to perform a task using unfamiliar software. The study reported a connection between computer experience, specifically experiences with programming and computer graphics, and computer self-efficacy. Since I teach in a computer lab setting I have seen students with very little computer experience demonstrate a lack of self-efficacy when asked to perform an unfamiliar task on computer software. At the same time, as instruction occurs and more time is spent using the software the self-efficacy of the students increases. A statement by Busch (1995) implies "we need to find a way for changing the perceived self-efficacy expectations among the students" (p. 155) fits the perspective that when students lack experience their self-efficacy expectations may affect their performance. Thus, it is important that the learning environment accommodates the inexperience and methods be used to boost the self-efficacy of the students so they will not become frustrated and give up. This is true, not only for the use of technology, but also for the literacy skills of all students regardless of the format of the reading whether it be in a book or on a computer.

Stone, Arunachalam, and Chandler (1996) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety that involved 160 students in a college accounting course. They gave the students a survey on the first day of class using a pre-test post-test method that was then analyzed using a T test. The first test found no effects of instruction on the measure of computer anxiety; so a second test was conducted to again measure the participants' computer self-efficacy and anxiety using the same measures as were used in the first study, but this time to measure at the beginning, middle and end. The second study included 65

participants and the results were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA. Stone, Arunachalam and Chandler (1996) reported both studies suggested that specific software training increased the level of self-efficacy, but further research would be needed to be able to more clearly identify the role of instruction on anxiety (pp. 365-366). They further articulated that there is a vested interest in better preparing the accounting graduates for future demands of the profession and that success depends partially on clearly articulating the relationships between accounting instruction, knowledge, skill, self-efficacy and anxiety. This same idea can be connected to high school students, as they too need to be able to meet the future demands they will face in post-secondary education and the workforce; building knowledge and skills while also increasing their self-efficacy and reducing anxiety.

Another aspect that technology affects relates to motivation, but is referred to as flow. Flow, as defined by Csikzentmihalyi (1990), refers to an optimal mental state with a high level of concentration when involved in an activity where nothing else seems to matter (p. 4). In itself, flow is an intrinsic motivation that occurs due to the task being a highly enjoyable experience. This relates to the level of difficulty of the task since if the task is too challenging worry and anxiety may occur, but if the task is too easy boredom may occur. According to Marszalek (2006) “Flow, then, is a mental state of high concentration that leads to optimal performance in any endeavor” (p. 36). Marszalek relates flow to testing, which is when students are considered to be performing at their best. Because testing requires preparation (studying) for the test, performance is relative to the challenge-skill ratio dimension of flow (p. 29). Anxiety with technology and testing may interfere with flow. Marszalek (2006) conducted a study that addressed a student’s inability to engage with a test and its effect on their motivation (p. 9). The study looked at two types of testing, paper and pencil tests and

computer adaptive testing, to determine if flow was more likely to occur with one type of testing over the other. Marszalek (2006) stated, “there was no significant correlation between flow and math or reading test performance” (p. 148), however, the findings included a negative relationship between test anxiety and flow (p. 155). The study concluded that test modality did affect the incidence of flow, but Marszalek stated that the results needed to be replicated before generalizations could be made (p. 169). One could surmise that the concept of flow then is not just related to testing, but to technology-mediated learning.

Adolescents use online technologies at home, at school and in mobile contexts, but in making changes educators should consider the future nature of the technology for students. Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo (2009) describe the need to frame the internet as a literacy issue that will allow an integrated analysis of online reading of information with online writing, media construction, and communication to provide a deeper understanding of how school settings should use the Internet (p. 265). The changes go beyond just incorporating the internet into our classrooms, as schools confront changes they will encounter problems along the way. A major challenge is that educators have to change their views of adolescents, their worlds and literacies (Luke & Elkins, 2000, p. 398). The technology choices are continually changing and also creating problems for schools and educators as they try to determine what technology to use, the cost effectiveness, the availability and the dependability (King-Sears, Swanson, & Mainzer, 2011, p. 570-1), while another aspect is the need to consider what technology is used in the workplace settings that students need to be taught how to use in school (Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009, p. 265). Schools need to avoid the resistance of technological innovations being integrated into classrooms (Cuban, 2001; Demetriadis et al., 2003; Hodas,

1993 Leu et al., 2009) and ensure that the integration of technology supports learning goals. King-Sears, Swanson, and Mainzer (2011) state “Technology should not be used independent of purposeful instructional goals” (p. 570). They maintain that when students are playing computer games they should still be learning, reviewing or practicing concepts that are directly related to the learning goals otherwise the use of technology with the absence of instructional contexts are unnecessary and may even be detrimental to learning (p. 570). It is important that the choices of technology are related to students’ needs and to the learning outcomes (Bosseler & Massaro, 2003; King-Sears, Swanson, and Mainzer, 2011).

Another problem many schools face involves the issue of inequity. School based literacy often sustains social inequity even though it is claimed to be reducing it (Buschman, 2009; Gee, 1989); moreover, achievement outcomes based on social class and culture tend to be stronger in the upper elementary and middle school years (Luke and Elkins, 2000, p. 397). Other ways inequities are evident are through social class issues, poorer school districts, while having internet access at school, often do not have internet access in homes (Cooper, 2004; Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009). While our schools are being pressured to raise test scores (Henry, 2007; Leu et al., 2009), online reading comprehension is not part of the testing regiment so there is little incentive for schools to teach the new literacies related to online reading comprehensions. In contrast, students from more prosperous districts tend to have internet connections at home and their teachers are found to be more inclined to integrate technology into their curriculum (Henry, 2007; Leu et al., 2009). Although the intent of NCLB is to prepare students at school for the online age, those from the poorer districts are least prepared. The Internet is a central source of information and the learning of our children is dependent on the ability to read and

comprehend complex information at higher levels. However, inequities are likely to occur if not integrated into the education of poorer districts (Jetton & Alexander, 2002; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Leu et al., 2009). Technological advances are increasing at a rate never seen before and include e-mailing, IM (Instant Messaging), text messaging, and cell phone use to name a few. All of these are used as forms of communication and require the use of literacy. Sternberg, Kaplan and Borck (2007) state “For students to be fully literate in today’s world they must become proficient in the new literacies practices of information and communication technologies” (p. 419). There is a difference between new literacies and the traditional print comprehension in that new literacies include communication with online reading comprehension and are defined by a process that incorporates self-directed text construction (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009; Leu, Zawilinski, et al., 2007). Warlick (2004) argues that being self-directed includes lifelong learning, which dictates the prosperity of students’ futures (p. 10). Warlick (2004) further points out that to prepare our children for their future they need personal, face-to-face relationships, which is a form of socialization that is sharing, guiding and nurturing; but this relationship is not intended to be one where the teacher is delivering information with the students passively receiving and storing that information, but one where teachers are instructing students how to teach themselves (p. 10). This also means that the students need to learn to control their information in positive, productive, and personally meaningful ways (Warlick, 2004, p. 22). It is then argued that educators should use technology both as an instructional tool and as an instructional topic for teaching literacy, to help prepare students for the future they need to become lifelong learners (Bawden, 2001; Buschman, 2009; Herrington, 1998; Marcum, 2002; McCrank, 1992).

In looking at the technology available and being used in society and business today, educators and parents need to also consider that the World Wide Web, social networking sites, interactive search engines, and collaborative work sites span age, gender, ethnicity, and educational levels and that computer, technology and cell phones are major methods of communication for students of all ages (Jones, Windsor, & Visinescu, 2011; Karsten & Schmidt, 2008). Students are often considered digital natives due to their extensive use of social networking, texting, and searching for information on the Internet and it is expected that they will have greater information technology experience (Jones, Windsor, & Visinescu, 2011, p. 60). One would think that because our students are growing up using more technology that they would feel more comfortable using and learning about information technology. Jones, Windsor, and Visinescu (2011) administered a survey to a sample of 190 undergraduate students enrolled in a required introductory computer course at a southwestern university to determine their comfort levels.

Jones, Windsor, and Visinescu (2011) investigated the average computer usage of the participants, half of the participants used a computer daily for two to four hours and 25 % of the participants used a computer for one to two hours daily. Fifty-six percent of the participants reported they had taken more than four classes that required them to use a computer and 94.7 % reported using a computer for four or more years, which exhibits heavy exposure to computer usage. In addition, 99.5% owned a cell phone, 80% owned a PC, and 87.9% owned a netbook or laptop. In this survey the participants were also asked how much they used several types of information technology. The most common usages were text messaging, next was e-mail and information search sites and then at a reduced level the next most commonly used information technologies included word processing, and broadband. It

was noted that most of the word processing were primarily used to write papers and assignments for classes. The expectation was that the participants would use communication software, such as Skype, more. The high use of text messaging and e-mail indicated that the participants preferred to communicate through written communication rather than verbally. The study's findings were that information technology used by the participants was more closely related to personal or pleasure related tasks. Participants, who had several years of technology use experience have limited knowledge of information technology, and are only moderately comfortable with the most basic tasks, which included deleting and copying files, installing software, formatting disks, and changing devices,. Their classroom learning did not significantly relate to their level of comfort with information technology. While this study's findings did not demonstrate a level of comfort due to the usage amount, other studies have indicated that the usage leads to comfortableness (Attewal, 2001; Jones, Windsor, & Visinescu, 2011; Luu, 2009).

Other 21st century skills, besides being able to use the technology, according to Azzam (2009), include creativity and critical thinking, which are needed to solve today's problems. Azzam (2009) defines creativity as "a process of having original ideas that have value . . . looking for new ways of doing things within whatever activity you're involved in" (p. 22). Creativity begins with a new idea, but must also "involve critical thinking as well as imaginative insights and fresh ideas" (p. 23). Many people associate creativity with the arts, but it is really a part of everything we do. Current challenges include , the increasing strain on our natural resources, advancing technology, strains financially on health care and even on education that all will "need every ounce of ingenuity, imagination, and creativity to confront these problems" (Azzam, 2009, p. 24). In order to teach creative thinking, teachers

must integrate reading, writing and math, encourage students to experiment and innovate without giving them all the answers, and allow them to problem solve. “By teaching students to think, we prepare them not only for employment and citizenship, but also for leading abundant lives” (Roberts & Billings, 2008, p 36). School faculties need to push the boundaries when thinking about literacy and how adolescents are educated, but also remember that there will not be one single solution or one right way to help students become literate.

Literacy as the Gateway of Life

Students cannot learn from books that they cannot read. “Improving reading . . . can be a victory for everyone involved. To meet state mandates and pass standardized tests in any subject area . . . young people must be able to read key materials fluently, skillfully, strategically, and critically” (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 17). It is imperative that teachers “enable students to learn the information and skills they need to become successful citizens of the current, changing world” (Hand, 2006, p. 40). This directly relates to the conclusions shared by Stone, Arunachalam, and Chandler (1996), who suggest that educators have a vested interest in preparing students for future demands and their success depends partially on clearly articulating the relationships between instruction, knowledge, skill, self-efficacy and anxiety. The changes in literacy demands have created an even larger gap “between the experiences provided for adolescents in school and the media saturated, technological, global life they will face when they graduate” (Rycik, 2008, p. 64). Rycik (2008) states that “In today’s fast paced world, literacy demands are expanding, and they include more reading and writing tasks than at any other time . . . Adolescents need high levels of literacy to understand the vast amount of information available to them” (p. 62). Literacy is a skill that is attributed

to not only school success, but also to the rapidly changing technology-driven society (Jeffs, Behrmann, & Bannan-Ritland, 2006, p. 37). Information and technology are constantly changing which means that schools can no longer depend on a static curriculum to prepare students to meet the ever changing demands of a global society. In just one generation, or 30 years, our ideas will have to change drastically, which will also raise the bar for literacy as just having the ability to read and to gain knowledge will no longer be enough (Walker, 1999, p. 18, 21).

The changes are not just within our country, but within our world. These changes are occurring so fast that the future our adolescents face is one that cannot be described. These rapid changes lead to predictions of an almost exclusively digital world. In the twentieth century workplace, as reported by Warlick (2004), people worked in straight rows, performing repetitive tasks while being supervised, which was characteristic of the times' vision of orderly mechanization, sequenced processes and the assembly of distinct though connected pieces (p.95). Michael Cox, a chief economist for the Federal Reserve Bank, predicts that after adolescents graduate they will have at least five jobs, four of which have not been invented yet (Armstrong & Warlick, 2004; Warlick, 2004). The face of our employed people has already drastically changed since in 1983 when it was reported that as many as seven million employed people already spent their day in front of a television screen or computer monitor, which included airline reservation clerks, travel agents, stockbrokers, newspaper reporters and editors, catalog order-takers, and customer service representative, secretaries, executives and even taxi drivers who now receive messages for their next fare location on a screen instead of by radio (Compaine, 1983, pp. 129, 137). This is not a complete list since these jobs from 1983 are continuing to change and continuing to depend

more on screen communicated text than previous generations who did more manual labor. Students need to be prepared to enter a high-tech workforce with skills not just applicable to school settings, but transferrable to careers (King-Sears, Swanson, & Mainzer, 2011, p. 577). Between 2000 and 2010 more than two-thirds of all jobs required some postsecondary education (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Deshler, Hock & Catts, 2006); which leads to speculation as to increased requirements as technology continues to change the workplace.

Students' skills needed after high school, are more diverse than ten years ago. Greenleaf and Hinchman (2009) quoted Friedman, 2005, "Our nation's future participation in the global economy are disrupted in significant ways when such large numbers of young people have literacy difficulties" (p. 5). Due to rapid technological changes it is unknown what skills will be needed in the future. Sternberg, Kaplan and Borck, 2007, indicate that changes in technology are going to influence the use of language to communicate and to think (p. 420). Young people are often referred to as 'digital natives,' due to have grown up with technology, and their skills are considered significantly advanced, however, they still lack aptitude in the use of online information, including locating and critically evaluating that information (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Leu, O'Bryne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009). Job opportunities for students entering what it termed a global market are changing, since jobs are being competed for worldwide. According to Hock et al. (2009) "these same adolescents are even less prepared to face the demands of the global economy" (p. 21). Snipes and Horwitz (2008) proclaim students "lack the foundational literacy skills necessary to read and comprehend the academic texts appropriate for high school and beyond . . . changes in the economy have made these skills essential for

participation in the modern labor market” (p. 1). Technological changes within the world prohibit young people’s success in school or the work place without high literacy levels.

Students are less prepared for the workforce, but also for college. “Millions of students are leaving school unprepared for college, work, and the many demands of adulthood” according to the Alliance for Excellent Education fact sheet, February 2006” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Students are taking additional remedial courses in college due to being unprepared (Greene & Winters, 2005; Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, & Tobin, 2004). The achievement gap and the below grade level performance of students in the 21st century will be associated with students of lower socio-economic status, emphasizing social inequities. “The 21st century skills movement will end up being a weak intervention for the very students – low income students and students of color – who most need powerful schools as a matter of social equity” (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009, p. 16). In 1977 the United States was able to claim having 30 percent of the world’s population of college students, however, by 2007 that proportion had fallen to 14 percent and it is persisting to fall (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007, p. 4). Due to the evolving global economy, America’s educational position in the world has declined, resulting in American workers competing for jobs globally, while concurrently many jobs are being eliminated through automation. New technologies being developed require creativity and higher levels of education atypical from the current education being obtained, as higher levels of literacy will be imperative (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007, pp. 6-8).

Education is necessary to find success in our global economy, a lack of literacy produces social ills, one of which is students who drop out of school. Students with lower literacy rates tend to have higher dropout rates (Anonymous, 2008; Denti & Guerin, 1999;

Ehren, Lenz, & Deshler, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999), with as many as 3,000 dropping out of high school every day (Santa, 2006, p. 486). Hock et al. (2009) attests “adolescents have not mastered the reading skills necessary for them to successfully respond to demanding secondary school requirements or compete for meaningful jobs in the workplace” (p. 21-22), which Salinger (2003) affirms is fundamental to their learning, success in school and in life (p. 79). Denti and Guerin (1999) claim that future dropout rates can be accurately predicted based on student’s third-grade reading skills, and those children who are lacking the literacy skills in the primary grade levels often begin to have a spiral of failure that often ends in dropping out of school (p. 232). It is imperative that these students’ reading difficulties be identified or they may begin to demonstrate behavioral problems that will allow them to slip further behind academically (Curtis & Longo, 1999; Salinger, 2003). Keeping students ‘on track’ has been shown to increase the likelihood of high school graduation by three and one half times (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Hock et al., 2009).

The history of poor performance in school, which most likely began in early elementary school, has been associated with high school dropouts. Fitzsimmons, Cheever, Leonard and Macunovich (1969) said “While common sense suggests that there would be numerous published studies of individual student differences over the years, such has not been the case” (p. 135). Barrington and Hendricks (1989) conducted a study focused on characteristics between prospective graduates and dropouts including a sample of 107 students, comprised of 51 dropouts, 32 non-graduates no longer in school, and 24 non-graduates continuing to work on their diplomas. The study also included a comparison group of graduates that were randomly selected and equaled the number of dropouts and non-graduates in the sample. Data collected included IQ scores, achievement test scores, reading

test scores, attendance records, grade point average, negative teacher comments in permanent elementary records, parental occupational status, number of schools attended and student gender. Fitzsimmons, Cheever, Leonard and Macunovich (1969) noted that some test scores or other information were missing from student records for various reasons. Data analyses were conducted on one variable at a time using one-way ANOVAs and several step-wise multiple regression analyses. Significant findings included that by 5th grade, the dropouts, were absent twice as often as those who graduated and by 9th grade the rate was three times as often, that negative teacher comments on permanent records were significantly higher for dropouts than for those who graduated, and that by third grade the dropouts showed a clear indication of academic problems with test scores below their classmates and below grade level performance. Findings of the study were consistent with a previous study conducted by Lloyd (1978) in that dropouts could be identified with 70% accuracy as early as the third grade (p. 318).

Dropping out of school is not the only social ill associated with poor reading, but also low paying jobs, high rates of unemployment, higher rates of health problems, more dependence on welfare assistance, mental health problems, and adult crime (Kronick, Morton, Peterson, & Smith, 1989, Denti & Guerin, 1999). Deshler, Hock and Catts (2006) affirm “the jobs requiring the most education and offering the highest pay are the fastest growing” (p. 1), which indirectly aligns to the rapidly changing workplace and the increase in technology previously discussed. If a student drops out of school they are often denied opportunities of obtaining the highest paying jobs, nor will they have the education needed for college. Kronick, Morton, Peterson and Smith (1989) assert “keeping children in school must be seen as a cost effective way of keeping them as adults out of corrections and mental

health and off welfare” (p. 126). In the educational field the literacy needs of adolescents have been neglected. When literacy policies are made or when funding is proposed most of the efforts are directed towards either children’s literacy or to help remediate adults’ literacy, but our youth literacy needs seem to be ignored or invisible (Moje, 2002; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; Vacca, 1998). Without a high school diploma or the literacy skills needed due to the dramatic shifts in technology, young people will struggle to participate in the modern labor market due to many of the low skill, high wage jobs being eliminated (Autor, Katz, & Krueger, 1998; Fergeson, 1991; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). Without higher literacy skills, skills that are needed to succeed in higher education, young people are incapable of functioning in school or in the workforce (Snipes & Horwitz, 2008, p. 1). The demands of today’s world require increased reading and writing tasks, which is why adolescents need to be in school, attain higher levels of literacy to understand the vast amount of information available to them, which can fuel their imaginations and creativity which will assist in creating the future world (Breivik, 2005; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Rycik, 2008).

Living in an information based economy has raised the bar for the level of literacy that is needed to be successful. “There were 140 million illiterate young people in the world in 2000” (Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 62). Literacy levels are not just a problem in the United States, however, in the United States the economy, the states and the local communities are all affected by literacy levels; especially when students lack the literacy skills needed to be successful in school and drop out this costs. “Over the course of his or her lifetime, a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost income” (Wise, 2009, p. 371). As illustrated by Wise, if all those students had graduated there would be

approximately an additional \$319 billion in income over their lifetimes. As reported by Wise (2009) “Researchers estimate that another third of each class entering ninth grade will graduate from high school—but without the skills and knowledge that adequately prepare them for college and work” (p. 372). It is suggested the literacy skills of many high school graduates are insufficient for success in the workplace and society and that low achievement in literacy parallels with high rates of poverty and unemployment (Anonymous, 2008; Wagner, 2000). Success of students definitely affects the future and there is a cost if educators fail these students.

As students graduate they no longer can depend on their high school diploma to provide them with a relatively well-paying job, since “between 2000-2010 more than two thirds of all jobs will require some postsecondary education” (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006, p. 1). “Young people’s literacy skills are not keeping pace with societal demands of living in an information age that changes rapidly and shows no sign of slowing” (Alvermann, 2002, p. 189). This signifies that “basic level literacy is insufficient in today’s world where both reading and writing tasks required of adolescents are continuing to increase in complexity and difficulty” (Alvermann, 2002, p. 190). It is easily accepted that we have multiple forms of literacy and that each form requires different reading skills and that all uses of written language occur in various places, all of which are part of the bigger picture of society as a whole. In regards to these trends in our changing world and the educational needs of adolescents, it is imperative that students take rigorous classes to be prepared to enter and successfully compete globally. The obstacle schools face is raising the literacy levels of secondary students, but likelihood of being able to ‘raise the bar’ and at the same time as raising the standards seems unlikely unless the middle school students entering high school

come with the necessary literacy skills (Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006; McConachie, et al., 2006; Walker, 1999). The literacy needs of students to be ready for an unpredictable future need to be considered. According to Armstrong and Warlick (2004):

The best thing we can teach them is to teach themselves This requires that students become not only literate, but also able to use that literacy within their personal information environment in order to succeed now and in the future. (p. 20)

Adolescents will need to learn how to be literate in the 21st century, which Warlick (2004), describes as thinking beyond the place we can see and the moment in time that we are experiencing (p. 46). Warlick (2004) interprets functional competence in the 21st century as having the ability to find, access, decode, evaluate, manipulate, employ, and express information both digitally and in print (p. 100), which are skills that cannot be at a competent level, but must be at a higher level if one wishes to find greater success in their future. The job market is seeking workers who can think outside the box, can demonstrate creativity and flexibility in problem solving (Walker, 1999; Warlick, 2004).

Finnie and Meng (2007) indicate that “literacy and numeracy skills influence labour market performance and income in specific ways other than educational attainment” (p. 44), however without the attainment of education many will not have the opportunity to compete in the global labor markets. Literacy is the cornerstone of achievement and it is important that all students graduate and be prepared for college, success, and productive lives. Information is powerful and 21st century literacy will give our students the powerful tools they need for their future.

Summary

This review of the literature has discussed the current status of adolescent literacy levels and instructional practices within public high schools in the United States and has

clearly demonstrated why improving literacy skills for all secondary students is an issue that needs to be addressed. Students who struggle need help from schools in order to be able to experience higher achievement levels that will allow them opportunities for higher education levels and the ability to compete in a global workforce. It is through the culture of the school and high expectations of the staff that will help motivate the students, and through the implementation of effective and culturally responsive literacy instructional strategies that educators can work with these struggling readers to help them be more successful in school. Without success in school students will be more likely to dropout, which will then cost society more as the earning potentials will be less.

The world is changing at such a fast pace it is very difficult for schools to keep up with knowing what skills students will need in the future. It is imperative that educators help students become multi-literate, creative, and critical thinkers with various forms of literacy, which will allow them to be able to communicate in a global market. It is only through the attainment of higher levels of literacy that struggling readers will be able to proceed into their future with confidence and the skills needed to be able to be productive citizens in this rapidly changing world.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perspectives of students who had been identified as struggling adolescent readers. This study was intended to explore the strategies being implemented to see if struggling readers perceived that their literacy needs were met. Many of these struggling readers had shown no progress after the eighth grade as measured by their Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Lexile scores and their ACT Plan scores, which determined that their literacy skills were below grade level based upon their performance on these assessments.

This study was a narrative bounded case study that focused on a Midwestern suburban high school with five student participants who had been identified as struggling readers. The study was narrative in approach since I used a writing prompt (Appendix B) to have the identified participants write about their literacy experiences. Creswell (2003) describes a narrative approach as “a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives” (p. 15). This directly relates to this study in the fact that the participants were asked to share their personal literacy experiences by writing about them. Sikes and Gale (2006) state “We make sense of the world and the things that happen to us by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to ourselves and to other people.” (p. 1). It is through the participants’ stories that the researcher is able to become engaged and to have the desire to want to know and understand more about the personal experiences being shared. The purpose of collecting these narratives, was to not only collect the personal stories of the participants, but to also analyze or interpret the evidence. It is the close association of narratives and themes that

enable “key messages and the interpretations that the teller wishes to get over” (Sikes & Gale, 2006, p. 4), which was evident when analyzing the narratives in this study.

Creswell (2007) describes case study research as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system of one case or multiple bounded systems involving multiple cases over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (for example, observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes (p. 73). As this study progressed, even though from the beginning I wanted to include more than one case, it was my continued goal to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue of adolescents’ experiences as they struggled with literacy in the natural context where this phenomenon occurred. Therefore this could be referred to as either a multi-case study, according to Yin (2003), or a collective case study according to Stake (1995), because both intend to study more than one case simultaneously while attempting to gain a broader understanding of a particular issue and providing the ability to make comparisons thematically across the cases. This use of the multi-case study, or the collective case study enabled me to find “interactivity” (Stake, 2005, p. 452) in being able to make connections between the individual cases.

It was my intention to gain a deeper understanding through the perspectives of the identified struggling readers, which can assist in taking a critical look at their struggles with literacy to determine how we, as a school, can have helped these struggling readers become more successful. The main overarching question that this study was investigating was: What perceptions do the participants have in regards to their literacy success? With the research questions as follows:

- 1) What perceptions do the participants have in regards to how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences?
 - a. How do the students describe their literacy experiences in their classes, regardless of the subject?
 - b. What benefits do students identify from these classroom experiences?
 - c. Where do students use literacy in school specifically any setting (i.e.: classes, library, interactions with others, etc.)?
- 2) What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the students' experiences with literacy?
 - a. Where do students use literacy outside of school?
 - b. How are literacy strategies applied outside of school?
- 3) What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy?
- 4) What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy?

This study was intended to help the building staff and other educators take a more critical look at their practices within the classroom to see what areas are working and if any changes are needed to improve literacy instruction to address the deficiencies. It was my intention as the researcher to keep the focus of this study on the perspectives of the participants through using their voices to communicate the meaning of literacy in and outside of school. The remainder of this chapter includes the rationale for conducting a qualitative study and a more in-depth discussion of the theoretical traditions used; the design of the

study including the participants, setting, sampling techniques, data sources, data analysis; and limitations of the study including issues of validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research as described by Grbich (2007) “tends to be seen primarily as an inductive approach using a research question and moving from instances gained in the data collection to some form of conclusion . . . questions tend to be exploratory and open-ended” (p. 196). According to Creswell (2003) “Qualitative research takes place in the natural setting. . . This enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants” (p. 181). Gaining the individual participant’s perspectives was the foundation of this study. This was different than quantitative research which focuses on cause and effect and “collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18).

The major tradition for this study was a case study. “The case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Case studies can have multiple definitions. According to Hatch (2002) “case studies are a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon within specified boundaries” (p. 30). Case study seemed to be the best tradition to use with its focus on data collection within natural settings and the identification of themes across multiple cases. This approach also emphasizes “the voice of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). For the purpose of this study it was very important that the voices of the participants were heard in the setting where the problem occurred, which enabled me to make

meaning of their experiences through narrative documents and to conduct interviews to aid in rich, thick descriptions. This process maintained a focus on the participants and their experiences. I was able to reflect on the information provided and ask clarifying questions to guide my interpretation of their experiences.

This study was a multiple-case study as it included five individual case studies. According to Yin (2003) “Information about each relevant individual would be collected, and several such individuals or ‘cases’ might be included in a multiple-case study” (p. 23). Conducting a multiple-case study is supported due to the way that I designed my research questions where the focus was on the perceptions of the students being studied. Yin (2003) states a concern with case studies is that a single case study “will provide little basis for scientific generalization” (p. 10). It is easily understood that a scientist will not base a generalization or facts off of a single experiment, but they would perform multiple experiments to support their findings. This relates to why I chose to look at each case individually so that the information gathered was able to be analyzed using cross-case synthesis in order to give strength to the findings and the study.

The narrative tradition was utilized through the collection of documents where the participants will be given a prompt and asked to write about their literacy experiences. Yin (2003) describes the narrative approach as a special practice where the researcher uses open-ended questions to gather open-ended answers that will “document the connection between specific pieces of evidence and various issues in the case study” (p. 104). Creswell (2003) states narrative research is “a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives” (p. 15). Connelley and Clandinin (2006) further state that:

Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

It is through the collection of the written documents that the participants provide that their perspectives regarding their literacy can be shared to help tell their story through their own words, which will help the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of their personal situations and struggles. Polkinghorne (2010) describes narratives as not being just written in nature, but also spoken, as they clearly communicate events and actions through time in an accurate time span (p. 396). This held true for this study as there was a time limit of three years put upon the participants for their stories. This time limit was to contain the experiences to the time spent at the setting where the study took place. This is important that the events took place in a specific local as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) defined place as “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place (p. 480). Without asking the participants to write stories about their experiences with literacy, this study would lack the rich, thick descriptions that add to its validity. The bounded portion of the case study occurred because there were specific limitations on the time, activities, and data that were gathered which defined boundaries.. These boundaries defined the location, which was a Midwestern suburban high school, and the participants struggling with literacy. This study was bounded in time by the purposeful selection of students who had attended the high school for three years, from their sophomore year in 2009, and graduating in 2012. These boundaries were intended to help focus on a specific time and population to gain a more in-depth understanding based on the perspectives of the participants.

Role of the Researcher

Patton (2002) defines the role of the researcher in qualitative research as the instrument (p. 14). For this study the role of the researcher was the key instrument, defined by Creswell (2007) as the researcher who collects the data themselves through the examination of documents, interviews and observations of the participants (p. 38). For this study I was the sole researcher and worked alone during the data collection and analysis phases of the study. Validity of the study is often at risk when working alone; however, certain measures can be taken to ensure validity, as explained in a later section of this chapter. Collecting data as the sole researcher allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants, but to also build rapport which allowed for greater trust in sharing their experiences. I also feel that analyzing their stories gave me insight into their worlds and helped to gain understanding of their experiences with literacy. I worked to establish rapport through daily interactions within the setting and wrote memos about my thoughts and reactions during the data collection and analysis phases.

Design of the Study

Site Selection

The setting for this study was a Midwestern suburban high school with an average population of 1,500 students contained within one building that consisted of three grade levels, ten through twelve. The community consisted of mostly middle to upper middle class Caucasians, specifically 93.7% according the U.S. Census Bureau as reported in 2006. The city had a population, according to the U. S. Census Bureau in 2006, of 29,581. The community was growing as was shared in a faculty meeting when it was stated that in the

2010-2011 school year there were over 900 kindergarten students, which resulted in larger class sizes and a need to redistribute the organization of the grades in each building. This growth is intended to affect the current high school as it is possible that it will require moving the ninth grade students to the high school within the next two years, which will affect the climate and culture since the current physical plant is only intended to house 1,600 students.

For this site, according to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website, the information in the following chart (Figure 2) looks at the disaggregated data for the Communication Arts End of Course Exam (<http://dese.mo.gov/>), which the target group took in 2010. This test reports whether the student scored at the below basic, basic, proficient or advanced level. The desired level is proficient or advanced. The data specifically is broken down into the categories of Black (not Hispanic), Female, IEP Student, Male, Map Free and Reduced Lunch, and White (not Hispanic). Of the students tested 38 were Black (not Hispanic) and of those 38 39% were in the basic and below basic categories. In comparison to the 640 White (not Hispanic) that were tested only 16.8% fell into the basic and below basic categories. More males than females scored in the basic and below basic categories and for the free and reduced students tested 49 out of 133, or 36.8% scored in the basic and below basic categories.

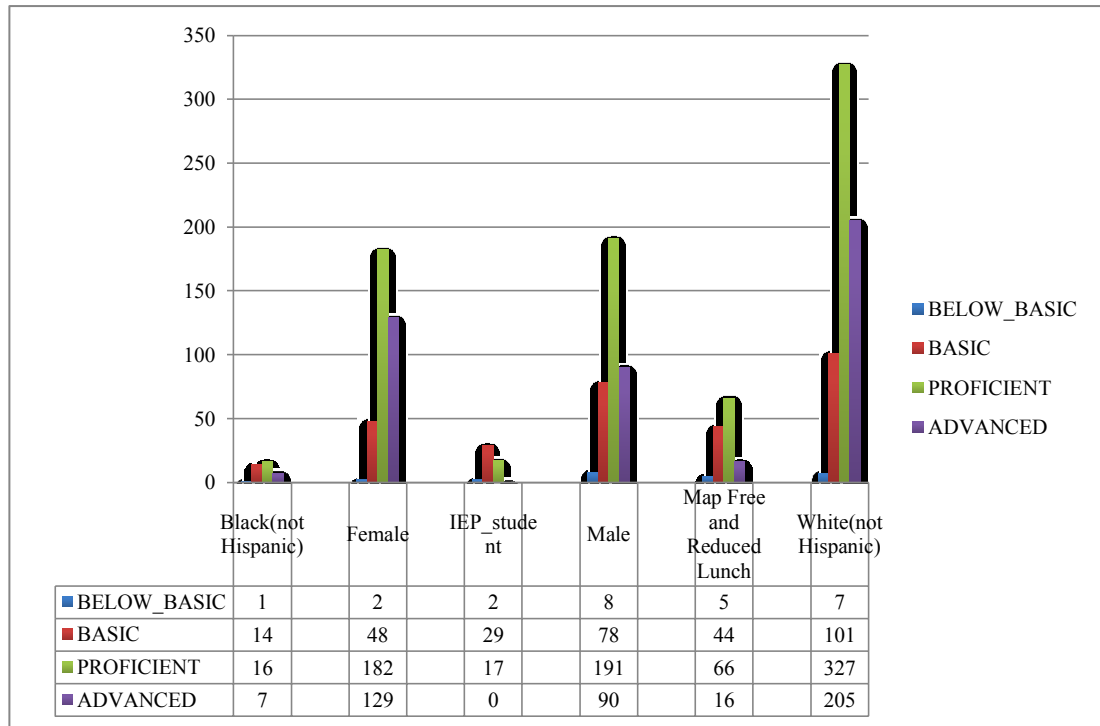


Figure 2

MAP Achievement Data for Midwestern High School 2010

Participants

The participants were 18 years of age at the time of this study, and they were identified as struggling readers during their sophomore year through the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) program utilized by the school. I am not aware of any other high school in the area that has used this program so that made this school the best choice for this study. The ILP program was a program used by the school to identify struggling readers and it was a form of Response to Intervention (RTI) that addressed the needs of the struggling readers and informed the students' teachers so they could implement reading strategies and document the results for the students identified so their progress could be monitored. This program has

evolved as it moved towards the development of the Student Assistance Program (SAP), which was to help give assistance to struggling students emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. Then the process evolved as each content team moved away from anecdotal documentation on their struggling readers and referring them to the SAP teams to data teams.

The data teams were formed so deeper meaning and instruction could be fostered that would still help the struggling students, but with more focus on the content standards. These data teams were also designed to work on using Common Formative Assessments (CFAs) to guide the instruction and to be a better form of RTI to help the struggling students with more specific interventions that met their needs. As we continued to strive to find ways that best met the needs of these identified struggling students the evolution from the ILP program evolved into advisory, where students were assigned to a teacher by grade level and lessons and team building occurred to allow the students to form a bond with their advisory teacher so they know this was someone they can go to for help. The process continued to evolve as we strived to meet the needs of the identified struggling students.

In order for the students to be identified they had to have scored a 15 or below on the ACT Plan test and their SRI Lexile score in the fall of their sophomore year had to be at the basic or below basic level. The ACT plan score is intended to predict the success of the student on the ACT test. The reading section of the PLAN Test measures reading comprehension. This test focuses on skills that include referring to details in a passage, drawing conclusions, and making comparisons and generalizations. The PLAN test was given to students in the 10th grade. As found on the ACT Plan website, the PLAN Student Score Report contains a lot of information about your skills, interests, plans, and goals. This information can be used to:

- make sure your remaining high school courses are the best ones possible to prepare you for college
- help you consider your options for after high school
- Your scores are between 1 (the lowest score you can receive) and 32 (the highest score you can receive). PLAN takes the number of questions you got right on each test and translates it into a number between 1 and 32.
- Just like grades, your scores tell you how well you did on each test.
- Your Composite score is simply the average of your test scores in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science (rounded to a whole number).
- The two scores directly under English and Math only range from 1 to 16. They tell you how well you did in two specific areas of each subject. These scores added together do NOT necessarily equal your English or Math Test scores. (<http://actstudent.org/plan/index.html>)

The Lexile score used was determined through the use of the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), which is a computer adaptive test that measures reading comprehension. According to the Scholastic Reading Inventory (2007) the SRI “measures reading comprehension by focusing on the skills readers use to understand written materials sampled from various content areas . . . include referring to details in the passage, drawing conclusions, and making comparisons and generalizations” (p. 8). “In 1999, four performance standards were set at each grade level in *SRI*—Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced” (p. 34). “The original standards for Grades 9, 10, and 11 were revised by Scholastic Inc. (January 2000)” (p. 36). For tenth grade students the ranges are: 699 and below are below basic, 700 to 1024 are basic, 1025 to 1250 are proficient, and 1251 and above are advanced (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2007, p. 36), with complete grade level performances as shown in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1

Scholastic Reading Inventory Lexile Scores

Scholastic Reading Inventory				
SRI Lexile Scores for Grade Level Performance				
Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Lexiles by Grade				
Grade	Below Grade Level ¹	At Grade Level ¹	Above Grade Level ¹	College & Career Ready Expectations ²
1	99 and Below	100-299	300 and Above	N/A
2	299 and Below	300-499	500 and Above	450-790
3	499 and Below	500-599	600 and Above	
4	599 and Below	600-699	700 and Above	770-980
5	699 and Below	700-799	800 and Above	
6	799 and Below	800-849	850 and Above	955-1155
7	849 and Below	850-899	900 and Above	
8	899 and Below	900-999	1000 and Above	
9	999 and Below	1000-1024	1025 and Above	1080-1305
10	1024 and Below	1025-1049	1050 and Above	
11	1049 and Below	1050-1300	1301 and Above	1215-1355

NOTE: By the end of the 11th grade, students should reach the college and career ready reading level (1300 Lexiles). For this reason, grade level performance is not defined for 12th graders.

Lexile Scores for Grade Level Performance										
Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Gr 8	Gr 9	Gr 10	Gr 11
100-299	300-499	500-599	600-699	700-799	800-849	850-899	900-999	1000-1024	1025-1049	1050-1300

The width of the bar varies by the size of the numeric range for the grade level band. For example, Grade 3 has a 100 point range, and is half the width of Grade 2, which has a 200 point range.

Gr 9
1000-1024

GR 10
1025-1049

¹Scholastic Inc. (2007). Scholastic Reading Inventory Technical Guide. New York: Scholastic Inc. Education Group.

²National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common Core State Standards (English Language Arts, Appendix A). Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers.

The participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling, specifically criterion based sampling, for the initial portion where the participants were invited to share their stories through written narratives. Purposeful sampling is “select information-rich cases strategically and purposefully; specific type and number of cases selected depends on study purpose and resources” (Patton, 2002, p. 243). The criteria for sampling included Lexile scores that fell in the basic and below basic ranges, ACT Plan scores of 15 or below in reading, included students that were 18 years of age, and had been a student in the same school for three years. Next, identification of participants that met the specified criteria gave rich descriptions through a writing sample that provided a writing prompt asking the participants to write about their experiences with literacy.

The first sampling was done in order to have a more manageable size for the actual case study, specifically the narratives that were read. During the initial selection process, even though I used specific criteria to narrow down the participants, there were more potential participants identified than was manageable and so it was through the written personal narratives that I evaluated the documents for the ones that provided the richest, thickest descriptions and then used theoretical sampling to select the participants for the investigation interviews. Theoretical sampling in data collection allows the investigator to select a sample of individuals to study based on their contributions to the development of the theory (Creswell, 2007, p. 240). The reason I chose to use theoretical sampling is because it allowed me to choose individuals based on their potential representation in relation to the important theoretical constructs of this study. For richer information I coded the narratives before narrowing the pool. It was through the theoretical sampling that I then selected narratives that represented specific populations, which included males, females, various

factors, which included English Language Learners (ELL), disabilities, and family demographics, and various ethnicities. By selecting information rich cases for study in-depth as the focus of this study this became a strength. “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). By studying these information rich cases the data generated insights and in-depth understandings instead of generalizations.

Data Collection

“There are three major sources of data for a qualitative research study – interviews, observations, and documents” (Merriam, 1998, p. 12). Data includes materials that the person doing the study records which includes interview transcripts, field notes, newspaper articles, official data, and subjects’ written memoranda as described by Bogdan and Biklen, 2007. These “records, documents, artifacts and archives . . . constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs (Patton, 2002, p. 293). It was important that the researcher determine which sources of data would provide the best information that would answer the research questions of the study. Since I gathered data through the perceptions of the identified struggling readers the use of official data, the written narratives and the interviews were vital in making sure that the best data was available and analyzed for a truer picture of the problem. I limited my study to five participants.

The first data source that I used included data related to reading achievement. Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect achievement data needed to understand the case being studied. The data that I collected was categorized as achievement data. The official achievement data included standardized test scores from the ACT Plan test, Lexile

scores obtained through the Scholastic Reading Inventory, ACT scores, whether the participant participated in ACT Prep classes, and Grade Point Average (GPA) along with demographic information provided by each participant.

A second data source that was collected were the personal narratives the students wrote from a prompt that was provided to them (Appendix B). The actual personal documents were writings that allowed the participants to tell their story of their experiences with literacy. I read all of the narratives word by word and line by line as I coded fifteen narratives. All of the coded documents were scanned into PDF files for storage and retrieval purposes, but only the selected ones were used in the analysis process.

I used descriptive statistics to describe what the information in the official data showed. It was through the use of descriptive statistics that provided a summary that enabled comparisons across people or cases being studied. It was the descriptive statistics that allowed for a large amount of data to be reduced into a summary, focusing only on the participants, whose “description lays the foundation for later analyses and interpretation of collected data” (Schreiber, 2008, p. 210). Schreiber (2008) states “descriptive statistics allow researchers to provide another context, a richer picture or enhanced representation, in which to examine the phenomenon of interest” (p. 210). The descriptive statistics were used to describe SRI Lexile scores, ACT Plan scores, ACT scores and GPAs.

In qualitative research one form of data that is gathered is interviews, which according to Yin (2003) is one of the most important sources of information for a case study. Patton (2002) describes interviews as an important source of data in a case study and states that they are intended to help the researcher to find out what cannot be directly observed. According to Patton (2002) “the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the

other person's perspective" (p. 341). This related to the purpose of my study, which was to examine the different perspectives of the students to determine if they feel their teachers successfully addressed their needs as struggling readers. For this study I developed an interview guide and conducted semi-structured interviews. The interview guide (Appendix D) consisted of a general set of questions that were aimed at garnering the perspectives of the students in terms of their experiences with literacy both in school and outside of school. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and they were recorded. Hatch (2002) explains how an interview is semi-structured "because, although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions" (p. 94). I used a digital recorder and the interview files have been stored digitally. Once the interviews had been conducted I transcribed them, coded them and then scanned the coded documents into PDF files for retrieval and storage purposes. It was also my intention to journal my thoughts and reflections after the interviews and those notes would be added to the files and used for the interview report.

Data Analysis

Achievement Data

To begin with the analysis of the achievement data descriptive statistics were used, which means that I shared the data for each of the five student's cases, but I did not run any tests of statistical significance. According to Schreiber (2008) "the inclusion of quantitative data can also enhance legitimacy (e.g., validity, credibility, trustworthiness, transferability), although this might not be appropriate for many qualitative projects" (p. 210). The quantitative achievement data that was analyzed included disaggregated data from the ACT

plan, and SRI Lexile scores, ACT scores and the final GPAs of the selected participants. This data was analyzed by looking for themes that emerged and through frequency, which was determined by specific achievement levels.

Narrative and Interview Analysis

The narratives and interviews were analyzed through the use of open coding, which Grbich (2007) discusses open coding and describes it as the researcher looking at the information word by word and line by line and analyzing the data to come up with important concepts that can then be broken apart further (p. 74). The analysis procedures began with coding and included both enumerative and thematic coding. Grbich (2007) described enumerative coding as classifying items by frequencies that are useful to the research questions. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding as analysis that is to be used to review notes, or in this case the transcribed interviews, and to help dissect the information in a meaningful way. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the actual codes as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). This basically requires the researcher to assign codes to the field notes from the official data, transcribed personal documents (narratives), and transcribed interviews in a way that analyzes the content into chunks of information that have meaning. All of the codes were recorded in a code book starting with the narratives and adding to the codes as needed while transcribing the interviews. This was just the beginning of the reductive analysis process.

Once the initial open coding had been completed for both the narratives and the interview codes, tags, or labels that had been assigned were then analyzed. These codes helped to categorize the information into workable units that were then further analyzed.

Grbich (2007) states “themes may come from previous relevant research which you have reviewed . . . or from your gut feelings, as well as from the views of those being observed or interviewed” (p. 32). Grbich (2007) states that with this approach the data speaks for itself before any themes are imposed. It was the identification of themes that helped to clarify the information from the narratives and interviews and allowed a deeper meaning to be gained. While identifying the themes it was also actually doing a cross-case analysis since each case was individually identifiable, but it was also looking for themes that occurred across all of the cases. When the analysis process first starts you are just trying to gain an understanding of each individual case/experience, but Patton, 2002 stated that combining or aggregating the themes that have been identified helps ensure that emergent categories and patterns that are discovered are *grounded* in specific cases and their contexts (p. 57). This enabled me to synthesize the data for all of the cases into one in regards to presenting the findings.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

One limitation to this study was the possibility of familiarity with the participants as a result of contact through classes and other experiences, which could be seen as a bias. Subjectivity in qualitative research and distance alone will not guarantee non-bias or greater objectivity. The case study included achievement data, narratives and interviews that helped to validate the study. Multiple sources of data supported triangulation, which in qualitative research aids in strengthening the study. Patton (2002) describes triangulation in terms of data as using a variety of sources of data in a study. The use of triangulation, combined methods, strengthened the study.

The idea of using a setting that was so close to the researcher was likely to influence the reactivity of the participants, which could be seen as a problem. Maxwell (2005) states

reactivity is the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals “and the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and to use it productively” (p, 108-9). “Becker (1970, pp. 45-48) pointed out that, in natural settings, an observer is generally much less of an influence on participant’s behavior than is the setting itself” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 109). For this study I believe that the reactivity was not much of a factor since the participants were used to seeing me in the building and the familiarity allowed them to feel more relaxed in sharing their perceptions regarding their literacy experiences.

Validity and Reliability

As previously stated the use of multiple sources of data and the use of triangulation aided in ensuring validity and reliability. Validity as described by Patton (2002) for qualitative research is that the researcher is the actual instrument, while in quantitative it depends on the instrument actually measuring what it is supposed to measure. In qualitative research it is the intention to generate rich information rather than just analyzing statistical data. According to Maxwell (2005) “two important threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that “stand out” to the researcher”(p. 108). To ensure validity multiple sources of data were collected included achievement data, narratives and interviews. Creswell (2007) describes reliability as the stability of the responses. In qualitative the interpretation of the data according to Creswell (2007) depends on thick rich descriptions, which makes it possible for interpretation. According to Denzin (1989), “in thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals is heard” (p. 83). Patton (2002) describes thick, rich description as providing “the foundation

for qualitative analysis . . . takes the reader into the setting being described” (p. 437). This helps the reader to experience and understand the world of the participants “in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance” (Patton, 2002, p. 438). It will be these descriptions that will connect the reader to the individual cases that will establish the significance of the experiences of the participants to create a level of validity that is not overshadowed by the interpretations of the researcher.

Reliability is “demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results” (Yin, 2003, p. 34). By having reliability the researcher reduced the errors and biases in the study. My procedures have been documented which allows either myself or others to duplicate this study. Yin (2003) suggests “the general way of approaching the reliability problem is to make as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder” (p. 38). During my study I documented the steps that I was doing to ensure that I would be able to repeat the same process, or someone else would be able to follow my steps if they wished to replicate the study.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

During this study it was my intention to remain respectful to all participants and considerate of the sensitivity of their abilities in regards to literacy and their success and/or failures in school due to their literacy struggles. I made sure that confidentiality was adhered to in order to protect each individual participant and stereotypes were avoided. It was my intention to report the findings and perspectives of the participants honestly and through their own words and experiences as much as possible. In order for a study to be trustworthy, it

must be ethical. As stated by Rossman and Rallis (2003) a study can meet ethical standards and not be trustworthy due to lacking in integrity (p. 63). They go on to say that if a study is trustworthy then it is also more reliable and valid and that it is also ethical. Consent was sought from all participants, the district superintendent and the building principal. A form was used to obtain the consent of the participants and they were informed as fully as possible the study's purpose and audience.

As the researcher I followed the protocol of ethical review that was provided by the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board, or IRB. The IRB for UMKC is responsible for reviewing all proposed research studies that involve human subjects to assure that all ethical issues have been addressed to ensure the protections of the human participants in the proposed study. To achieve this protection the autonomy must be protected, the benefits of the research must outweigh the risks, fair procedures in the selection of the subjects must be promoted and an informed consent process must be used. I followed these guidelines provided by the IRB to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants were maintained.

In the next chapter the findings from the analysis of the data are shared. The findings help to create a clear understanding of the experiences of the participants and their perspectives in regards to their struggles with literacy while attending the Midwestern high school.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The problem this study addressed was the literacy skill levels of adolescents and the fact that many struggle to perform at proficient levels academically. For the purposes of this study, literacy skills were defined as the ability to read and write, in addition to the ability to listen, view, think, speak, and express oneself through multiple symbolic systems at a developmentally appropriate level (Moxley & Taylor, 2006, p. 2) . All students need to be literate in order to find success in college or a job after high school. It is reported that more than eight million adolescents lack the reading skills needed for them to be successful at the secondary level and to be able to compete for meaningful jobs in the workplace (Adelman, 2006; Hock & Deshler, 2003; Kamil, 2003), and these same adolescents are even less prepared to face the demands of a global economy (Friedman, 2005; Hock et al., 2009). Students with low literacy levels often face academic failure, which leads to discouragement and disengagement from school and for many results in dropping out of school altogether (Schumaker, et al., 2006, p. 64). According to a report written by Chapman, Laird, Ifill, and KewalRamani in October 2011 for the National Center for Education Statistics the national dropout rate was approximately three million students, which accounted for 8.1 percent of the 38 million 16 to 14 year olds living in the United States (p. 8). Without literacy skills, high school graduation and success in the workforce for these students will often be out of reach.

The purpose of this narrative bounded case study research was to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the participants that had been identified as struggling

adolescent readers. Within the setting the teachers were mandated to create lessons that embedded literacy and to document on identified struggling readers their progress on specific literacy strands that were adopted by the school. My purpose was to discover the perspectives' of the student participants in regards to the strategies that were implemented in one Midwestern High School and if the strategies met the needs of these struggling readers and to validate what we, as teachers, were being told to do in regards to creating lessons embedding specific literacy strategies in all content areas. The participants were identified as struggling readers during their three years at the high school based on SRI Lexile scores, where the scores were in the basic to below basic range, and ACT Plan scores, where the scores were a 15 or below. It was the students' experiences with literacy during these three years that this study was striving to capture through the stories and experiences the participants shared with the researcher. This chapter presents findings from a narrative bounded case study of five struggling adolescent readers in one Midwestern suburban high school. The identities of the school, the students, and the teachers have been kept confidential to ensure anonymity.

My research questions for this study were: (a) What perceptions do the participants have in regards to how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences? (b) What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the students' experiences with literacy? (c) What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy? (d) What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy?

As the researcher I remained open to the process of qualitative research and I remained open to learning something from each case through achievement data, narratives,

and interviews. This allowed me to see firsthand the perspectives of the participants and to find meaning from their achievement scores, their written stories, and the information they shared in the interviews. By remaining open, the perspectives of the participants gave me new insights into adolescents as they deal with their struggles with literacy, both in the classroom and outside of school.

The setting was chosen because the school site, the school-wide requirements to focus on literacy, and the students were familiar to the researcher. It was this familiarity with the students over the three years that they were in the building that allowed a rapport to be established. This study took place from May 2012 at the end of the participants' senior year until May 2013. All data were collected during that one year time span; even though the achievement data that were collected in May 2013 covered the three years the participants were students in the setting of the study. The relationship of time spent with the participants varied from five months to three years. Some of the participants had been students within my classes, some I had known for only a few months to several years, while others I only knew by proximity within the building, specifically meaning that I would see them almost every day within the area of the building where my classroom was located, even though I did not have them in class. It was through visibility in the setting and interactions with these participants that trust was established in the relationship between the participants and the researcher. This setting allowed me to observe these participants not only during classes, but also in the hallways throughout the school day.

Data Sources

Three data sources were used for this study. The first data source was achievement data from various official documents. I chose to include achievement data that demonstrated

the success these participants had achieved, but to also show their achievement struggles with literacy. Specifically the SRI Lexile scores and the ACT plan scores, which were tests administered at the beginning of their sophomore year, were indicators used to help identify these participants at the beginning of their three years in this setting as struggling readers. Even though one participants scores were originally higher than would typically be accepted as an identifier teacher input and recommendations were also utilized as they were able to identify literacy deficits within the classroom that were not observable though test scores. Indicators of their successes included their ACT score, their GPAs and their final SRI Lexile scores, which were in their senior year. Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect documents to provide the data needed to understand the case being studied. Data includes materials that the person doing the study records which includes interview transcripts, field notes, newspaper articles, official data, and subjects' written memoranda as described by Bogdan and Biklen, 2007. These "records, documents, artifacts and archives . . . constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs (Patton, 2002, p. 293).

The documents collected would be categorized as personal documents, since they are personal experiences written by the students in a narrative format. The actual documents were writings by students that that were in a communication arts class, or they were asked by their communication arts teacher to come see me, where they were given the writing prompt and asked to write about their experiences. These documents were intended to allow the students to share their own experiences in their own words. These documents were written in the language of the participants and their significance is that they tell you what is important regarding their personal literacy experiences in school, as suggested by Miles and Huberman

(1994) when they discuss needing to determine the significance of the documents. Of the documents written by students from the 2012 class who fit the criterion sampling, they were given the invitation through their Communications Arts class where they were given the narrative consent form (Appendix A) and the writing prompt (Appendix B). If they consented by signing the consent form they then would write about their literacy experiences based on the writing prompt provided and then turned those in to the researcher.

I invited 50 students to write a narrative. Fifteen of the 50 students consented to have their stories included in this study, which included two males and 13 females. The first step was reading and coding these 15 documents to determine if there were any themes that would emerge or if there was any information shared that would need further inquiry for clearer understanding of the experiences shared. From these 15 documents theoretical sampling occurred to select the individual cases, which consisted of one male and four females, to be a part of a multiple-case study. Theoretical sampling was used because as Patton (2002) states this allows the researcher to sample “incidents, slices of life, time periods, or people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs” (p. 238). This allowed me to specifically look at incidents the participants wrote about regarding their literacy experiences for further inquiry to be conducted by inviting the selected participants to be interviewed. The multiple case study consisted of five cases, which included the experiences of one Asian male, one African-American female and three Caucasian females. The theoretical sampling identified other factors that aided in the selection of the cases for the purpose of gaining an even deeper understanding of their personal experiences and perceptions of their literacy experiences during their high school years. These five cases were personally invited by the researcher to be interviewed for this

study. When the researcher issued the personal invitation face-to-face the participants were also given the interview consent form (Appendix C). Once they agreed to be interviewed and they had signed the consent form interviews were scheduled. The interviews were typically thirty minutes in length and they were conducted in the researcher's classroom, but only when classes were not in session so there would be privacy. This setting was chosen as it was a familiar setting to the participants so they would feel comfortable while discussing their personal literacy experiences.

In the next section, discussion of findings, I reported the findings by data set and through the identification of common themes, interpretive identifiers, and descriptive codes that became apparent through the coding process.

Discussion of Findings

Through the analysis of the data collected four themes were identified, which allowed the researcher to see both similarities and differences in the perceptions of the participants through their unique experiences. All of the participants at various levels aligned with all four themes, which were self-efficacy, personal experiences, literacy skills, and other influential factors. In the first section of the analysis achievement data was analyzed to get a look at the academic progress of the students based on standardized tests, which allowed the researcher to see how the participants scored on these assessments. I am beginning with the fifteen narratives that I started with prior to the theoretical sampling that reduced it to the five cases that were studied more in-depth. After the first analysis of the narratives I am then going to share each case and the findings relevant to each case on the achievement data, which demonstrates the success each of the participants experienced during their high school

years, their personal narratives and the analysis of them, the interviews and finally the cross-case analysis.

Analysis of Narratives

The 15 narratives that were collected were written by students in the class of 2012 during their Communication Arts class at the end of the school year or brought to the researcher by the students that wished to participate. The narratives that were coded were the 15 who agreed to participate by signing the narrative consent form and who turned in their written narratives to the researcher. Of the 15 there were two males and 13 females who wrote the narratives and consented for them to be included in this study. Of these 15 participants there were 11 Caucasian females, one Caucasian male, one Asian male, one African-American female and one Hispanic female.

I began by reading all of the narratives, and I began the analysis with open coding, which is where I looked at the information word by word and line by line looking for important concepts that could be broken apart further, (Grbich, 2007). The coding process also included both enumerative and thematic coding. Enumeratively I was looking for item frequencies within the narratives that would be useful to the research questions, following the Miles and Huberman's (1994) description of dissecting the information in a meaningful way while tagging and labeling units of meaning to the information within each narrative. Once the initial coding of the information, where chunks of the information had meaning, I then recorded the descriptive codes into a code book and recorded the frequency of each code.

The next step was analyzing these descriptive codes to look for similarities, or connections that could be categorized into interpretive codes, which would lead to themes, which according to Grbich (2007) may come from the research being reviewed, from gut

feelings, or from views of those being observed or interviewed, but that the data speaks for itself before any themes are imposed (p. 32). The identification of the themes helped to clarify the interpretive codes and allowed for deeper meaning to be gained through categories and patterns that emerged. While coding these documents I was able to learn more about these students and their personal experiences with literacy. Many told about personal situations and how they assigned meaning to these experiences. The openness of the students was very surprising and yet also very informative. The coding revealed three main themes and one categorized as influential factors. The three main themes were self-efficacy, personal experiences, and literacy skills, which were consistently applicable to most of the narratives. The fourth theme identified was influential factors, which were outlying ideas that were expressed in various ways, but were sometimes reactions to/from the other three themes or how the participants felt they responded to situations, which had a few similarities but mostly varied for each participant. I included influential factors because the interpretive codes distinctly identified each participant and their perceptions to their literacy experiences.

Self-efficacy. The first theme identified was self-efficacy. The interpretive code for this theme was self-image. Self-efficacy is defined as the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals and they are more likely to challenge themselves and to be intrinsically motivated. These students will also accept the responsibility for any failures, while students with low self-efficacy will often avoid challenging situations and they often have very low aspirations. The interpretive code of self-image includes self-confidence.

A part of self-image includes self-confidence, which is defined as belief in yourself and your abilities, confidence in oneself or one's own abilities, and your attitude towards

yourself and your abilities, but can also demonstrate a lack of self-confidence, defined as not believing in one's abilities and having a negative attitude towards oneself and one's abilities. Both of these aspects of self-image demonstrated how the students saw themselves. The lack of self-confidence was visible in statements written by students, which included:

“My poem wasn't very good.”
“I was never the best writer.”
“I am not very good at writing.”
“As far as writing goes I have always struggled.”
“I was prepared but not prepared enough.”

In contrast the demonstration of an increase in self-confidence is clearly evident in the narratives through the following statements:

“I feel I did really well on it because I knew the structure of the paper and it flowed. I was very happy with the turn out.”
“My experiences with literacy during my senior year turned out to be positive, for lack of something boring, but instead completely different.”
“I love to read.”
“I am thankful for the privilege to read and write. It has made me a smarter person.”
“I have always been a very good reader.”

When a student felt they were good at something they included that in their narrative and you could tell they were happy about it because the statements were written using positive language. Whereas in the statements reflecting their lack of self-confidence you can see the opposite as they pointed out their weaknesses. This is best stated by Bandura (2006) “Belief in one's efficacy is a key personal resource in self-development, successful adaptation, and change. . . Efficacy beliefs affect whether individuals think optimistically or pessimistically, in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways” (p. 4). Bandura's statement clearly aligns with statements found throughout the narratives of this study.

Personal experiences. The second theme identified was personal experiences, defined as experiences relating directly to the individual and that are connected to both inside and outside of school in the lives of these individuals. This theme included interpretive codes of response to academic experiences and outside influences. These interpretive codes included challenging academic experiences, accomplishments, personal obstacles, and childhood influences. There are many reasons why children may have difficulty reading which can include the lack of exposure and engagement in language play, limited exposure to bedtime reading, which has to do with the home literacy environment, family based socioeconomic status, in homes with limited English proficiency or where parents' reading levels are low, or even because of a reading disability that has been diagnosed (Lyon, 2000, Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998), which are all personal experiences that vary from one person/household to another. Throughout this study my interactions with each participant brought to light their varied backgrounds and personal experiences that definitely affected their literacy experiences.

Personal experiences included personal obstacles, which are outside influences, defined as things that stand in the way of the individual; something the individual has to overcome; can include dealing with peers, high school 'drama', background noises and disruptions/distractions during class, social life, and adjusting to the setting. Specific examples the students wrote about regarding personal obstacles include the following:

“There is a lot of drama and influences that cause students to not focus very well and then there is a simple disease called senioritis.”

“My learning experiences with new classes was a great experience but also difficult at times I needed to focus but my mind was more focus on the distracts outside of school and in school.”

“School is a hard place to be when you are really trying to focus and have a social life at the same time.”

At the same time childhood influences, defined as things that occurred as a child that influenced the child’s development; can include moving around, changing schools, struggling due to a lack of skills, disability that affects achievement and learning through a second language (ESL/ELL). These examples the students shared include the following:

“Finding success in writing hasn’t come easy. During the writing process I struggles to form my thoughts and make it flow.”

“My spelling and grammar have always been a mess, mostly because English is my second language.”

“As far as writing goes I have always struggled. If I write a paper now it honestly sounds like a 5th grader wrote it instead of a senior.”

“Throughout high school, literacy has always been a struggle for me personally.”

“Getting good grade was difficult for me since English is second language.”

Also under personal experiences were academic experiences, which for some are challenging, defined as an experience in the educational setting that is not easy, but requires work and more effort than might be perceived. In regards to challenging academic experiences one student wrote, “It wasn’t until this year that I was opened up to literacy in another class. Advanced Creative Photography caused me to go into more depth and think harder about what I write.”

Another aspect of personal experiences includes accomplishments, defined as something completed successfully; something done admirably or creditably; or as an achievement. As for accomplishments some examples the students wrote about include:

“Throughout my high school years I’ve had a lot of success in my writing ability and expressing through my writing.”

“It has made me a smarter person.”

“In the end I received the highest grade I’ve ever gotten on a paper.”

“Throughout high school the literacy that I have has increased dramatically.”

Literacy skills. The third theme identified was literacy skills. Literacy skills that have been identified for success in the 21st century include “information and communication skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, and interpersonal and self-directional skills” (Weis, 2004, p. 13). For this theme I found strategies that the students repeatedly referred to in their stories regarding their experiences with literacy, which directly related to specific skills used and taught in literacy. They included thinking, verbal communications, written communications, listening, reading ability and asking questions. Each of these strategies are defined for clarification. Thinking is the act or practice of one that thinks; thought; a way of reasoning; judgment; refers to the thought processes used to evaluate information and the practice of using such conclusions to guide behavior and to also demonstrate comprehension. Verbal communication is communication that occurs verbally and includes talking, listening (radio), and watching television. Written communication is communication that occurs through writing and includes writing (hand written), texting, e-mail, and internet searches. Listening skills are skills as they apply to verbal communication, but involves the ability to process and respond at the appropriate level to what is heard. Reading ability is being able to read at a specific level and whether it allows the student to be able to meet the expectations or not- meaning whether they have the reading ability to handle the content for the level of the class. Asking questions is to ask questions for clarification when faced with a lack of understanding.

Literacy skills were mentioned by all of the students in their written stories. The specific skills and strategies they referred to the most were reading and communications, including both verbal and written.

“Looking back on high school there’s been a lot of ‘things’ stuffed into my brain. . . Most of this has been in the form of writing papers.”

“I personally think literacy is the basis of learning.”

“The criticism I have received over the years has improved my writing a lot.”

“In high school I have had to write many papers.”

“I have always been a very good reader.”

“I’ve learned how to become a better listener, speaker and writer.”

“I love to read and view literature but in some areas such as expressing myself and writing about certain subjects I find it hard to do so.”

Influential factors. The fourth theme was influential factors, which essentially are outlying ideas. In the outlying ideas the interpretive codes included student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors. Student inputs consisted of lack of effort and work ethic, which both related to the efforts of the students in their academic endeavors. Specifically the lack of effort was when students admitted to not putting forth the effort needed to achieve; while work ethic was the willingness the students put forth in terms of extra effort and time. According to Gabriel (2011) hard work leads to accomplishments that have both personal and external rewards (p. 38). Teacher inputs included teacher assistance and teacher expectations. Teacher inputs included students getting assistance from their teacher for help with their literacy weaknesses and that the expectations of their teachers were at a higher level than they had previously experienced. Teacher expectations according to Ince (2002) often motivate students because of their need for approval from their teachers (p. 481) and these expectations are considered more likely to promote school success for students (Lane, Pierson, Stang, & Carter, 2010. P. 164). The third interpretive code was psychological factors which included stress, family support and other sacrifices. Psychological factors can pertain to the mindset pertaining to or dealing with awareness or feelings, which were determined by factors that the students mentioned that included feelings expressed by the participants in regards to their experiences. Specific feelings expressed included stress, a feeling one gets

when a task is daunting and the person does not feel able to handle the situation easily, family support, which pertained to their awareness of support from their families in their academic endeavors, and other sacrifices, which were related to the students' perceptions of sacrifices made by family members to allow them to have education opportunities, which in essence put pressure on the participants. All of these narrative codes were factors that influenced the student, whether their success or their lack of success, and not all were out of the control of the student's actions, but some were.

A few students mentioned the issue of literacy causing them stress, a feeling one often gets when feeling overwhelmed. One specifically stated, "Simple things were so hard for us to understand and had gotten a stress from literacy." Specifically the topic that was repeatedly mentioned in almost every student's writing was in regards to giving credit to the assistance their teachers gave them as a major factor in their success and in getting the help their needed to be successful. Specific statements included the following:

"Creative writing with Mrs. [name removed] helped me really express who I am as a person and to find my inner self."

"Junior year I had an amazing teacher, I got really good grades in her class, but when it came down to it, I didn't learn that much because she over-helped us and we didn't get to think for ourselves."

"I do believe they prepared me for the next step in life; college."

"My teachers would sit there and go through each theme, attention-catching phrase, and concluding sentence with us and it would really help."

"My teacher was very genuine. She gave me tools that I still use to this day."

"I couldn't have done it without my teachers."

When looking at the interpretive code student input and the aspect of lack of effort, which is defined as involving the person admitting that they did not put forth the effort and did not try to achieve, students in their stories specifically referred to situations where they did not put in the effort as shown in the statement, "I don't like doing busy work so writing

papers usually becomes a problem.” At the same time the work ethic, another aspect of student input, became apparent in their stories, which is defined as the willingness to put forth extra effort and time such as extra study time to achieve success with literacy. One specific example given that demonstrates the willingness to put forth extra effort was, “I know I am going to have to work super hard to do well in all my classes as well as keep my grades up.”

Analysis of Narratives for the Theoretical Sample

After the initial analysis of the narratives a theoretical sample was then completed to narrow it down to the five cases, while allowing the researcher to look at specific incidents. From the 15 documents originally coded, the theoretical sampling occurred to select the individual cases. These consisted of one male and four females, to be a part of a multiple-case study. I went back over their narratives to look closer at their responses and how they aligned with the themes and interpretive codes for each theme. From the narratives not all of the five chosen fit every theme or interpretive code, however, their narratives still helped to paint a picture of their experiences. The theoretical sampling was not based solely on their narratives or descriptive data, but it was also to make sure that each case was unique and represented a broader population within the school where the study took place. Next, I am including a brief analysis of the achievement data prior to delving into each individual case. I will share the achievement data as it applies to each particular case more in-depth as I share each case individually.

Analysis of Achievement Data

In looking at the information used to identify students as struggling academically, information was collected at the end of their senior year to determine if they met the goals of

the school and if they were successful. The scores used to identify these students as struggling students were their ACT Plan score, which had to be a 15 or below, and their SRI Lexile score from the sophomore year, which was identified as at basic or below basic. For a student to score at proficient on the SRI Lexile they had to be at grade level. For a sophomore to score proficient the score range was 1024 and below. To score basic a student would score one to two years below grade level, the range for grade eight was 899 and below and for grade seven from 849 and below. A student was not considered a beginning reader unless their score was below 100; so all of these students fell into the basic and below basic categories.

The ACT Plan was given in the fall of the sophomore year and it was a test that was intended to determine the projected score of a student on the ACT test. If a student scores a 15 in English on the ACT Plan it is projected that they will score an 18 on the ACT and if they score a 17 in reading on the Plan they are predicted to score a 21. The goal of the high school where the study occurred has a goal for all students to score a 20 or higher on the ACT. Also included was information on whether a student took part in the ACT Prep classes or not since it was encouraged for students to take the ACT prep classes if they plan to take the ACT or if they want to improve a previous ACT score. These classes are taught a couple evenings a week at the high school where the study occurred by teachers from within the staff.

The next two sections on Table 2 included SRI Lexile scores from both the students' sophomore year and senior year. The goal is that their score will improve each year they take the test to show that they are improving in their literacy skills. If a student was a border line case their Communication Arts teacher were consulted to see if the student was a candidate

to be identified as a struggling reader, or not since the teacher's expertise in the field and their connections with the students were important information. With the next two sections pertain to results from the ACT test and if it was reported that the student took the test more than once. The school's goal was that all students taking the ACT score a 20 or higher.

The last two sections of Table 2 are the ending GPA and their class rank. This class had a total of 478 students. The five students did all earn a final GPA of at least 2.5 or higher, which was one of the criterion for selecting students to be participants in this study since the intention was to show success despite their difficulties with literacy. When looking at class rankings, they really only were included to provide a picture of the level of competition these students faced to beat out their classmates. For struggling students this is not an easy task, but the real significance is in their GPAs and that all scored at least a 2.5 or higher, which equates to a B average, which is a real accomplishment for any student who struggles with literacy. Included below is Table 2 with the academic achievement data for the five participants, which will be explained individually for each case.

Table 2

Academic Achievement Data for Participants

	Sally	Mary	George	Lucy	Jane
ACT Plan Score- Reading	No Score	13	No Score	14	14
ACT Prep Classes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
SRI Lexile Score 12th grade year	950	912	180	1123	854
ACT Score - lowest score	12	12	16	15	16
ACT Score - highest score	12	14	28	16	20
# Times took the ACT	1	2	2	2	4
Ending GPA	2.519	2.525	3.269	3.571	3.214
Class Rank	385	370	249	178	257

Analysis of Interviews

The third data source I used was interviews. In qualitative research one form of data gathered is interviews, which according to Yin (2003) is one of the most important sources of information for a case study. Patton (2002) describes interviews as an important source of data in a case study and states that they are intended to help the researcher to find out what cannot be directly observed. According to Patton (2002) “the purpose of interviewing, then,

is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 341). This relates to the purpose of my study, which is to examine the different perspectives of the students to understand their perspectives in regards to their literacy experiences as struggling readers.

For this study I developed an interview guide (Appendix D) and conducted semi-structured interviews. Hatch (2002) explains how an interview is semi-structured "because, although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions" (p. 94). The interviews were conducted with the five participants identified through the theoretical sampling of the narratives.

The data analysis process includes both enumerative and thematic coding. Grbich (2007) described enumerative coding as classifying items by frequencies that are useful to the research questions. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding as analysis that is to be used to review notes, or in this case the transcribed interview, and to help dissect the information in a meaningful way. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the actual codes as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). These codes help to categorize the information into workable units that are then further analyzed. Grbich (2007) states "themes may come from previous relevant research which you have reviewed . . . or from your gut feelings, as well as from the views of those being observed or interviewed" (p. 32). Grbich (2007) states that with this approach the data speaks for itself before any themes are imposed.

When coding the interviews I began with reading the transcribed interviews word by word and line by line looking for items that were frequently mentioned. While coding the interviews I did add one interpretive code and several descriptive codes, but I also did not use

all of the descriptive codes that I used for the documents. Even though I added several descriptive codes I found it interesting that the themes did not change. Each interview also brought to light the drastic differences in the experiences of these five students. All four themes were evident in all five interviews, but the interpretive codes that were evident varied for each interviewee as will be shared in the presentation of each case. I have also included a chart in Appendix E that illustrates the coding as it applies to each interviewee. The definitions for the coding are the same as previously mentioned and only the new ones are included in the results from the first interview with Sally.

Within-Case Analysis

This next portion of this chapter is dedicated solely to each individual case, from the five cases selected for interviews. However, before sharing the analysis for each case a short description of each participant and their individual narrative transcribed word for word as written by each participant are included. For each of these five participants I have given them pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Case 1: Sally

Sally, a Caucasian female, was considered an independent student since she was not living with either parent. Sally shared that she had no contact with her mother who had a drug problem, very limited contact with her grandmother due to her living close to her mother, and she never mentioned her father. I have known Sally for two years as I had her as a student in two classes. It was during this time that she began to open up to me when she was struggling with issues outside of school. It is my opinion that these interactions were an example of her trusting me with personal issues that created a rapport that allowed her to

share her struggles in school regarding her literacy skills honestly and openly. Sally's narrative is as follows:

High school, most people may think it's the worst three or four years they have ever experienced and most people look back and wish they could do high school all over again. A High School experience is more than just an experience to some people, and others it's just a place you got to pass to get to your final future plan.

Beginning with my first year, (sophomore year) where my best experience started. I have gone from switching one school to another and the learning environment was changeable in most cases of any individual switching a school. Of course everyone was new to a new place, but I was the newest anyone could be. The most impacting situation that was brought to my attention was not the size of individuals but the actual size of the school. There was a big change for me since I was not used to coming to a complete stop in the hallway when you are trying to get to a class that was all the way downstairs. I was not the brightest student in my class but I did make passable grades even with transferring during the second semester. As the year went on, the classes instead of becoming harder, they got easier, which really impacted me further down the years because I then began to slack.

Junior year then came along in my high school life and that is when things started to really turn around. There were more tests, studying that had to be done, bigger projects, and even more papers that had to be written but a certain due date. I was prepared but not prepared enough. I would say my junior year is when I began to really slack which had brought my grades down and also switched my mind from

caring to telling myself at least it is a passing grade. I had definitely learned on days I really wanted to focus and I had learned something new each day I did really want to concentrate, but in high school education is not the only thing that happens. There is a lot of drama and influences that cause students to not focus very well and then there is a simple disease called senioritis. I feel most students get this either really bad their junior year or throughout high school. This disease definitely affects the attendance as well as grades. I know I had a really bad case of it and with me being a senior this year it still affects me. My junior year I had taken a lot of hard classes that I either needed to graduate or I just wanted to for the more education. My learning experience with new classes was a great experience but also difficult at times I needed to focus but my mind was more focus on the distracts outside of school and in school.

Senior year was a breeze! I really focused this year but then on the flip side I took all really easy classes. I felt as if I read a lot more just because of the communication arts class I was in since we read a new book every month. I really enjoyed that class and I even enjoyed writing a paper for once. I still had that bad case of senioritis but this year, it really was not that bad of a problem. This year really flew by, I had taken basically all the classes that would get me a passing grade and the more I played around on Photoshop the different things I learned and used at home.

My experience through high school has changed how I look at the future. I slacked a lot with no excuses yet I came a long way and made it through all the boundaries through ruff times I had been going through. I would definitely love to go back a redo a bunch of things I should have done and I definitely regret slacking and getting into drama here at high school. School is a hard place to be when you are

really trying to focus and have a social life at the same time but if I could give anybody advice about high school, I would tell them to keep your head held high, education is far more important than friends that may not be there your whole life and to keep at a steady pace don't stress yourself out and definitely do not get behind! Like I said, I had learned a lot in high school most of the time I really paid attention but the times I would let things distract me I wish I could have listed to those things the most.

Achievement data analysis. In looking at the achievement data there was no record of an ACT Plan score for Sally. This could be due to the fact that she moved half-way through her sophomore year and either her previous school may not have given the same test or scores were not received from them. Without the ACT Plan score there was no way to project how Sally would do on the ACT test. Next, I included information on whether a student took part in the ACT Prep classes or not since it was encouraged for students to take the ACT prep classes if they plan to take the ACT or if they want to improve a previous ACT score. These classes were taught a couple evenings a week at the high school where the study occurred by teachers from within the staff. There was no record of Sally participating in these ACT prep classes.

The next two sections on the Table 2 included SRI Lexile scores from both the students' sophomore year and senior year. The goal was that their score would improve each year they took the test to show that they were improving in their literacy skills. In looking at Sally's SRI Lexile scores initially she did score below the range for her grade level, which means that she was at basic level. Without having an ACT Plan score Sally's communication arts teacher would have been consulted to determine if Sally was a candidate to be identified

as a struggling reader, since the teacher's interactions in the classroom and their expertise in their field would yield important information that was pertinent for the identification process. In looking at Sally's SRI Lexile score for her senior year it does show an increased score, which is expected if their skills are improving, but it was still not to the level of proficiency that is expected as can be seen in Table 1 (p. 96) where it states that by the end of the 11th grade students should reach the college and career ready reading level. During Sally's senior year her SRI Lexile score falls in the below grade level for eleventh grade, which means that during her senior year she scored below grade level, which would actually be a drop in performance compared to her sophomore year.

The next two sections of Table 2 pertain to results from the ACT test and if it was reported that the student took the test more than once. Sally only had one ACT score reported and it was a 12, which is definitely below the school's goal of all students scoring a 20 or higher. There was no record of Sally taking the ACT Prep classes, which are offered to help students improve their ACT scores.

Sally's GPA was 2.519 and her class rank was 385 out of 478 students. Sally's GPA did meet the criteria of this study to demonstrate that she was successful by attaining a GPA of at least a 2.5. In looking at all of Sally's achievement data and knowing that her SRI Lexile scores were below grade level leaves the question of whether she will be ready for college or if she will have to take remedial courses.

Narrative analysis.

Self-efficacy. This theme included the interpretive code of self-image defined by self-confidence. Sally's narrative as a whole included both aspects of self-image, where she demonstrated a lack of self-confidence and an increase in self-confidence. Below are

excerpts from Sally's narrative that demonstrate various aspects of self-image, which directly related to self-efficacy in her writing.

Sally demonstrated a lack of self-confidence in this statement, "I was not the brightest student in my class but I did make passable grades even with transferring during the second semester," which related to a time in her sophomore year. Yet she also demonstrated an increase in self-confidence when talking about her senior year. "Senior year was a breeze! I felt as if I read a lot more just because of the communication arts class I was in since we read a new book every month. I really enjoyed that class and I even enjoyed writing a paper for once." Both of these examples demonstrate that Sally was aware of her weaknesses with literacy, but also demonstrated is the self-confidence she felt when she was finding success during her senior year in her communication arts class.

Personal experiences. The theme of personal experiences had two interpretive codes, academic experiences and outside influences. Outside influences were demonstrated through personal obstacles and childhood influences. Personal obstacles are things that stand in the way of the individual, but they are something the person can overcome. Childhood influences are things that occurred in childhood that can affect ones development, such as disabilities and a lack of language, which can be overcome to a degree, but not always are these able to be completely done away with. Only in the area of outside influences did Sally give evidence in her narrative for this theme.

Sally stated "The most impacting situation that was brought to my attention was not the size of individuals but the actual size of the school," which falls under personal obstacle as the size of the building is something that was not in her childhood and it was something that she could overcome. Sally also stated "I have gone from switching one school to another

and the learning environment was changeable in most cases of any individual switching a school.” This fit outside influences described by childhood influences, because a child cannot always control where they live or when they move due to factors out of their control. It is clear from Sally’s statement that she moved, changed schools and had to make adjustments to a new learning environment.

The interpretive code of academic experiences was defined by challenging academic experiences and accomplishments. Challenging academic experiences includes classes that the students might find difficult or that will require more work, while accomplishments refers to something the student has completed successfully.

Sally wrote about a time during her junior year in high school, which clearly demonstrated a challenge for herself academically.

Junior year then came along in my high school life and that is when things started to really turn around. There were more tests, studying that had to be done, bigger projects and even more papers that had to be written but a certain due date.

Sally also referred to an accomplishment in reference to her high school years as a when she stated, “I had learned a lot in high school.”

Literacy skills. Literacy skills were the third theme that was defined by six literacy strategies which included thinking, verbal communications, written communications, listening, reading ability, and asking questions. For Sally the literacy strategies that she specifically referred to regarding her experiences with literacy were reading and writing. This is evident in Sally’s statement “I felt as if I read a lot more just because of the communication arts class I was in since we read a new book every month. I really enjoyed that class and I even enjoyed writing a paper for once.” In this one statement she mentions reading and writing as two literacy skills that she used in school.

Influential factors. This last theme was related to outlying factors that were important and included three interpretive codes which were student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors. Student in-puts was defined by work ethic and a lack of effort. Teacher factors was defined by teacher assistance, which consisted of the teacher giving one-on-one attention after school, and teacher expectations. The third interpretive code was psychological factors that was defined by family support, stress, and other sacrifices. These are varied in that they all affect the success of the student, but some externally while others internally and yet some are from their own doing while others are totally dependent on others. Sally did not mention any of these in her narrative, which means that this theme did not apply to her story.

Interview analysis

Self-efficacy. The first theme that was evident throughout my interactions with Sally was self-efficacy; specifically pertaining to the perceptions shared in the interviews that are directly related to themselves. For this study self-efficacy relates to the perceptions of one's self and directly relates to self-image and socialization and it is directly related to success of tasks and the ability to achieve, and includes self-image and socialization interpretive codes.

One of the interpretive codes for self-efficacy was self-image, which was defined as self-confidence and self-advocacy. Self-advocacy, the only new descriptive code for self-image, was defined as standing up for oneself and seeking the help needed to make sure that your own needs are met. In looking at the coding results Sally only had results for self-confidence under self-image. The only code that she did not exhibit was self-advocacy.

During the interview with Sally she shared experiences that demonstrated self-confidence. When asked about classes taken during high school that they liked or disliked

Sally shared that a class she disliked was “probably geometry since it is not my best subject, so I was really struggling.” When asked about any specific experiences at school that she felt did not help her with literacy in her classes or anything that kept her from doing her best Sally’s response was “Probably the testing; I am not very good at tests so that kind of and just like when I see a D on my paper it kind of brings my confidence down.” Both of the previous statements demonstrate that Sally was very aware of her weaknesses, which she discussed using language that demonstrate her self-image in a way that showed a lack of confidence in her own abilities. Other examples that demonstrated Sally’s experiences pertaining to self-confidence can be seen when she stated that whenever she sees an A on a paper that her confidence goes back up, which she referred to after her confidence going down because of a low grade. Sally also shared that in her senior year in comparison to her sophomore year that when having to get in front of people she had more confidence, as seen in her statement “I feel like I can get in front of people a lot easier, maybe not as easy as other people.” When I asked her if she felt a little more confidence Sally stated “Yeah a little more confidence and maturity.”

The second interpretive code for the theme of self-efficacy was socialization, which was added to the code book for the interviews. Socialization was defined by peer-relations and aspirations/goals. Peer relations is defined as interactions and dealings with people of a similar age and often referred to as friends – social settings, clubs, jobs, and class. Sally, when asked what it was like for her being in school, referred to her experiences as “I had fun with like I had a social life here of course, a lot of friends, um we did a lot of things together like went to football games all those activities.” Another situation Sally referred to that related to peers was when asked about whether from her experiences in school, in any class,

did she see any benefits that she could identify that have made her stronger and that helped her to be better and more prepared for her future, she replied “Um I mean the people around me I guess helped me.” I understood this to be her peers, but she did not specify at this point if she was including adults too. When asked where she used literacy outside of school in reference to peers Sally stated “. . . just if you’re writing on Facebook or in your social life you use a lot of literacy.”

The second part of socialization, which was aspirations/goals, was defined as the desire to achieve something (such as success, but in the world or life, but not at school); establishing objectives with a deadline. Sally did not mention aspirations/goals in her interview. In talking to her at a later date she mentioned that she had been accepted to a college, but at the time of the interview she was not sure what her plans were going to be since as an independent student she did not really understand her options at that time.

Personal experiences. The second theme that resonated throughout all five interviews was Personal Experiences. The two interpretive codes for this theme were response to academic experience and outside influences. The first interpretive code of response to academic experiences was defined by challenging academic experience and accomplishments.

In regards to academic experiences Sally would refer to not doing well in a class, such as geometry, but she would not refer to it as being challenging, but instead she would put it back onto herself as that not being her best subject, which again demonstrated her lack of self-confidence as a personal obstacle. In regards to accomplishments Sally did not share any accomplishments, even though I assured her that graduating on time even with her literacy struggles was an accomplishment. Throughout my interactions with Sally during the

study her lack of self-confidence was evident in most situations both in and out of the classroom.

The second interpretive code for the theme of personal experiences was outside influences. This interpretive code was defined as personal obstacles, childhood influences and freedom. Sally shared that personal obstacles for her included that “It was hard to focus because I had a lot of friends in my classes that I knew; so it was distracting, but I really did try my best for my future.” Sally also mentioned that she “. . . had to make sure that I did not let my social life take over too much. I need to focus since it was high school and high school really counts when you’re going to college.” Sally referred to having struggles in her personal life, but she related how she feels that she has become strong as a person due to those struggles.

Childhood influences was not directly addressed by Sally until I asked her to describe her personal experiences in high school, to which she asked if I meant at [name removed] high school, which was not the school where the study occurred. So I asked Sally if she had been at [name removed] high school, where the study was focused, for all three years and her reply was “Um no well I came half my sophomore year.” Other than explaining that she had to move, since she was not able to live with her mother, she did not specifically give any examples of childhood influences. Sally only mentioned moving during her sophomore year, but when looking back at her narrative she wrote about switching schools. Her specific comment was “I have gone from switching one school to another and the learning environment was changeable in most cases of any individual switching a school.” This statement leads me to believe that Sally did switch schools more than once.

The third aspect of personal experiences was freedom, added for the interviews, was defined as the ability to make choices and not feel as restricted with rules both in and out of school. This code did not apply to the interview with Sally.

Literacy skills. The third theme was literacy skills with one interpretive code of (literacy) strategies. This interpretive code included the same six descriptive codes as identified in the narratives, which include thinking, written communications, verbal communication, listening, reading ability and asking questions. These are all strategies all of the students mentioned, even if individually they did not mention every strategy, they use both in and out of school as will be demonstrated with each case.

During the interview one of the questions asked was for the students to identify weakness and strengths they felt they had with literacy. Sally only identified literacy strategy as her strength, which was reading. Sally related her strength in reading to the reason that she really liked a class was “. . .because we got to read a lot and I really liked those books that we read. I actually got into them.” In terms of identifying her weaknesses, Sally stated that listening, speaking and writing were the areas that she had the most difficulties with. Sally specifically referred to listening as a weakness “. . .because I get distracted easily, but then I try to work on it. I am a visual learner so I just have to see it.” In regards to speaking Sally said speaking was a weakness because she did not like getting in front of people and specifically stated “I am horrible at getting in front of people.” In terms of writing, Sally stated “I’m, not very good at writing papers at all.”

Another question asked was “Do you think literacy is important in school?” Sally stated that she felt literacy was important in school

. . .because it helps people to get stronger in a way it helps them like . . . I feel

that it would help them in the future to speak or write in . . . I am sure that people who have failed at those just don't focus and probably slack and probably wish that they would have listened so that they could be someone in the future in a way.

Sally also did feel that since her sophomore year her skills in speaking have improved as demonstrated through her statement "I feel like I can get in front of people a lot easier , maybe not as easy as other people, but just um I don't know." Another skill Sally feels has increased is her writing as she said "It's more I guess like my papers are longer, just I use more in depth words I guess." In regards to her thinking from her sophomore year to now she stated "I feel like I can figure out things a lot easier and just kind of breaking it down."

The next several questions were in regards to the use of literacy outside of school. Sally responded with ". . . just at home, like if you pull out a book and you want to read it or just if you're writing on Facebook or in your social life you use a lot of literacy." When asked if you use literacy outside of school anywhere besides at home Sally replied "I guess if you're in extra activities outside of school." From that point it required specific examples in the form of a question to get her to think of how else outside of school literacy might be used.

When asked what she could do outside of school to help herself improve her literacy. Sally mentioned several strategies. Sally stated:

You could I mean you could go on the Internet and just like type in something random and then read about it or even like watch the news and if you really want to learn more about what's going on you just go on the Internet and I feel like the Internet really helps a lot.

Sally also mentioned another suggestion that "I feel like that if um maybe like one of your friends can help you too, you could ask them and like if you don't feel comfortable with a stranger." After asking for clarification this was referring to asking for help as in a tutor, but going to a friend instead of someone you did not know.

Influential factors. The fourth theme identified was influential factors with the interpretive codes of student input, teacher factors and psychological factors, which were the same ones identified in the narratives. The additional descriptive codes that were identified and still applied to the previous interpretive codes were family support and other sacrifices, both of which are psychological factors. Family support pertained to support given from family members when faced with challenges, can be encouragement and/or a form of tutoring. Other sacrifices related to sacrifices from others, such as family, for the student in their educational endeavors.

The only interpretive codes from the influential factors that were identified for Sally included psychological and teacher factors. When asked what it was like being in school, Sally responded with “It is also stressful.” However, Sally did mention teacher assistance, a teacher factor, several times; specifically identifying types of assistance that helped her when she was struggling and even included suggestions of ways a teacher’s assistance could be more beneficial. One of the interview questions asked what something a teacher did in terms of helping the student to feel the most successful. Sally responded by stating:

I guess just whenever I needed help they would come over and help me through it and talk me through it. I mean they didn’t just give me a straight answer they let me do it, which really kind of helped a lot too; so that I learned on my own and not just always with help.

Another way Sally’s teachers assisted her was “They would break it down into simpler terms that I could understand.” When asked if there was a specific teacher or class that helped the most with her literacy Sally said “All my teachers were basically there when I needed them. So I do not really know a specific person.” The one strategy that she said her teachers could do to help her more would be to give more one-on-one assistance; Sally related this to the

idea that when a student asks a question, but they don't like to be in front of people, that "The teachers could come to the students and just kind of help like talk to them one-on-one."

Case 2 - Mary

Second is Mary, an African-American female, who mentioned being supported by family and friends in all that she does and seemed to rely heavily on that support. Her records show that she lived with both parents. No other information is known about her family or her home life. During the study I met Mary, when she was a student in my class, and it was her senior year, so I have only known her for one of the three years that she was in school during this study. Even though her narrative was not as in-depth as others it was written in stark contrast to the observations and interactions I had with this student in the building, which made me want to delve deeper into her responses. In reading Mary's narrative it seemed very to be pessimistic about school, which was the opposite of my interactions with Mary at school. Following is Mary's narrative:

Ive had a lot of literacy experiences at high school and outside of high school.

There have been many times where I thought it was so pointless to learn certain things that we learn in class because half of it we will never use in our life Some of the ways that we learn things is really stupid I think and just the reason for them But I guess we learn from it in the long run. School is pointless but we do learn a lot.

Achievement data analysis. In looking at Mary's achievement data it showed that Mary scored a 13 on the ACT Plan test. As a predictor this would show that Mary's potential score on the ACT would be about a 17. Next, Mary did participate in the ACT Prep classes, which were aimed at helping students to improve their ACT score. It was the combination of Mary's 13 on the ACT Plan and her SRI Lexile score of 950 her sophomore year that

identified her as a struggling reader. Mary's SRI Lexile score of 950 was considered to be below grade level, as can be seen on table 1 (p. 96). In looking at Mary's SRI Lexile score for her senior year it does show a higher score, which is expected if their skills are improving, but it was still not to the level of proficiency that is college and career ready. In looking at table 1 it does show that Mary's SRI Lexile score her senior year of 1070 would fall into the level for at grade level her junior year. Since the students are not tested for a SRI Lexile score their junior year this leaves one speculating at what level she attained her junior year.

The next two sections on Table 2 pertain to results from the ACT test and it was reported that Mary did take the test more than once. Mary's lowest ACT score was a 12 and her highest score was a 14. While Mary did show improvement, which could be attributed to her taking the ACT Prep classes, she still did not meet the school's goal of earning a 20 or higher.

Mary's GPA was 2.525 and her class rank was 370 out of 478 students. Mary's GPA did meet the criteria of this study to demonstrate that she was successful by attaining a GPA of at least a 2.5. In looking at all of Mary's achievement data and knowing that her SRI Lexile scores were not at the college and career ready level the question of whether she will be ready for college or if she will have to take remedial courses is also applicable.

Narrative analysis.

Self-efficacy. This theme included the interpretive code of self-image defined by self-confidence, which was demonstrated in Mary's narrative. An excerpt from Mary's narrative that directly related to self-efficacy in regards to her self-confidence was "There have been many times where I thought it was so pointless to learn certain things that we learn in class

because half of it we will never use in our life.” This statement clearly demonstrates a lack of self-confidence. In Mary’s narrative she did not give any examples that would show an increase in her self-confidence.

Personal experiences. For the theme personal experiences the interpretive code of academic experiences was present for Mary, but not the interpretive code of outside influences. In terms of academic experiences Mary’s statement “School was pointless, but we do learn a lot,” does allude to the accomplishment of having finished high school. In her narrative she did not mention any academic challenges other than referring to school as “stupid” and “pointless.” These comments were not similar to any of the interactions that I had with Mary throughout the school year, nor were they similar to her attitude when I interviewed her in August after her senior year. I could surmise that this could be due to the stress that many seniors feel at the end of their senior year.

Literacy skills. Literacy skills were the third theme that was defined by six literacy strategies. Mary did not specifically include any examples related to this theme in her narrative.

Influential factors. This last theme was related to outlying factors that were important and included three interpretive codes which were student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors. For Mary this theme did not apply as she did not mention anything related to the interpretive codes in her narrative.

Interview analysis.

Self-efficacy. During my interactions with Mary all four themes were identified when the coding of her interview was completed. For self-efficacy Mary identified with self-confidence for self-image. When asked if she felt like in some of her classes that there was

not as much focus on literacy Mary replied “Yes cause math is not one of my strongest subjects,” even though the question did not ask about her abilities, Mary’s response shows her lack of confidence in that subject. When asked to describe her literacy abilities now compared to when she was a sophomore, Mary replied:

In certain areas I think that they maybe stayed the same, but in the majority of them they’ve improved a lot since I’ve been actually just trying to change the old ways of me not like always trying to focus all the time and everything. So I think a lot of it improved cause I knew that I had to do better and to keep getting better for me to get to where I needed to be and to where I wanted to be so I think they have improved.

This statement demonstrated some confidence in terms of improvement, but it also demonstrated a lack of confidence in regards to skills that she thinks have not improved during her three years in high school. The last reference related to self-confidence Mary made was:

I have more confidence in the literacy and I have learned some more skills of the listening, viewing and talking and everything else. So I could feel more confident than I did in like my sophomore year or junior year and now that I am in college I can work on it and like actually do that now that I am in college and be and try out everything that I have learned so that I can get a bigger effect on it.

Personal experiences. The second theme of personal experiences also resonated in Mary’s interview. In terms of the interpretive codes, both applied. For response to academic experience challenging academic experiences was the area that was identified through the coding of Mary’s responses during the interview. When asked what it was like for her in school here at the high school Mary responded “It was just really different, kind of, just learning different things that I didn’t learn like in Jr. high and middle school and all those things and that like the work was going to be a lot difficult.” To clarify her response I asked her if it was harder and Mary responded that “I think it was a little bit harder.” Next, I asked

her if she found any class that she thought was really difficult for her and Mary's response was:

Probably this year, or this past year, it was my algebra II class because I'm not a math person; so it was kind of hard to actually adjust in that class and it put my math skills to the test and I really had to pay attention in that class and get everything done that I had to get done and to figure out all the work because I don't do well in math at all.

The second area identified was for outside influences, specifically personal obstacles. When asking Mary what she could do to help herself to improve her literacy skills she replied:

I just kind of knew that since it was coming to my last years and that getting into college this was what it would revolve around that I had to just get (pause) just tell myself that I had to get more focused.

Mary also mentioned that when she worked after school with a teacher it helped as she stated "I could understand without being distracted with everyone else in the class."

Literacy skills. The theme of literacy skills with the interpretive code of (literacy) strategies, verbal communication and listening were the two specific strategies that were coded the most for Mary's interview. Written communication and asking question were also coded, but not as frequently. In regards to listening Mary referred to listening when she stated that "I really had to pay attention in that class." Mary also referred to listening by stating "I ended up not doing so well because I didn't focus as much." When specifically asked which areas of literacy she felt were the most difficult for her in school Mary replied "Probably the listening part, because also in classes I get distracted easily so it's kind of hard for me to get back on track and really listen to what the teacher's saying." Mary also stated that it ". . . was kind of hard for me to listen all the time because I was just always being distracted by something else." Also as mentioned earlier for positive self-confidence it was

mentioned that she had “. . . learned some more skills of the listening, viewing and talking;” which also related to listening as a literacy strategy. Throughout Mary’s interview it was obvious that the various interpretive codes were interrelated, which was evident when the personal obstacle of distractions in the classroom interfered with her listening and paying attention.

In looking at the coding for verbal communications Mary gave specific examples of using this strategy multiple times. One question posed asked Mary what she would do to try to help herself when she knew that she was having troubles Mary stated that she would “. . . go ask like some of my friends for help and have like little study sessions.” I then asked if she felt those study sessions helped her and Mary replied:

They did a lot because knowing my friends and everything they had they knew like some other knowledge of the certain work that I didn’t know so then they were kind of giving me their knowledge and then that helped me revolve around the knowledge that I needed to get to and they also gave me tips on like studying and everything else so it really helped.”

To try to gain a deeper understanding I then asked if she thought her friends talked to her on a different level than her teachers and that maybe made it easier to understand. Mary’s response was:

Yeah a little bit. They kind of also they kind of also dumbed it down to where since they were kind of in like the same age group I guess that would also kind of help that they knew also in our type of language how it would be easier for me to understand instead of making it how my teachers understood it.

I asked for clarification on ‘our type of language. Mary laughed then said:

Kind of just like different like different ways of how people being in the same position that we are in, like both in the same grade or we’re both doing the same work or whatever; then we are like on the same speed so that also kind of helps.

I also asked Mary which areas of literacy she felt she had the most success with. Her response was:

Probably the talking and expressing myself because I already like to talk so then expressing myself in like all my different opinions compared to everyone else's also made it pretty easy for me to do and like kind of connect back to the work and like give off how I felt about it, what I was learning about it and how it also helped me learn better.

I then asked if she thought it was easier for her to talk about something than to write about it.

Mary's response was "I think so because I don't really like writing; so talking was probably helping a little bit better."

In regards to the other aspects of literacy strategies that were not frequently coded during the interview some examples are included here that include asking questions and written communication. Mary stated that in order to try to help herself she would ". . . go actually ask my teachers for help." In regards to written communication Mary, as previously mentioned, said "I don't really like writing" and identified it as a part of literacy that is a weakness for her. Throughout my interactions with Mary it was evident that she was aware of all of the literacy strategies and which were strengths and which were weaknesses for herself.

Influential factors. The fourth theme, influential factors, with the interpretive codes of student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors, were all identified from Mary's interview. In regards to student input, specifically lack of effort, during the interview Mary's comments that directly pertained to lack of effort are evident in the following statements:

I ended up not doing so well because I didn't focus as much because knowing that this wasn't what I wanted to do my mind was set that I don't really care; so it was kind of hard and I really didn't care on top of that; so it made it even worse.

This statement was in reference to a class Mary was enrolled in, but once she found out it was geared to a profession she was not interested in she did not even really care about putting forth the effort to succeed in the class. I asked Mary if they had any class that really helped her with her literacy skills and she said her broadcasting class did. In reference to whether there was any class that she felt did not help her in her literacy Mary replied “I didn’t put in enough effort to actually use a lot of literacy in that class (math) because it was just one of those classes that I didn’t really care so much about.”

Also under student input that related to work ethic, Mary made statements that related to work ethic multiple times as the following statements demonstrate:

. . . knowing that I was going to have to put more effort into it instead of just slopping something down and just thinking that was going to work; so I had to put more thought into it and actually work harder.

The photography (class) I thought it was going to be easy, but I had to put in a lot of effort into that one.

Probably my textiles and photography class were the ones that I had to put a lot of effort into even though I thought they were going to be a breeze.

Broadcasting was one of my favorite classes and I actually put in the effort to use all of the literacy pieces to actually get stuff done in that class.

The second interpretive coded for this theme during this interview was teacher factors, specifically teacher assistance. Mary shared that she did receive assistance from teachers through the following statements:

I had a couple of teachers just always try and sit down and talk to me about things that I had to do that like if I had a low grade in that class or something they how they could help me pull it up.

Some of my teachers made a really really strong effort to make sure that I was doing everything that I had to do and were on top of it to know that they helped me get the courage that I could actually finish it even if I was behind or something.

Some of my teachers were giving/telling me past examples of students that were in my position and then on certain assignments they would like make it into different words that I could understand and putting it into baby steps for me to be able to

actually get what I was supposed to do and um helping me stay after school so that it was just like a one-on-one and something that I could understand.

At the same time Mary shared situations where there was a lack of assistance from teachers.

Specific examples included:

Some of my teachers that I used to have in previous classes they wouldn't really make an effort to attempt to help me even though they're teachers.

Some of my teachers probably, but not too much could have also done more on their part and made a bigger effort to help their students more cause some just always tell their students oh well you need to start getting your work done and turning it in on time cause of what's going to happen, but they could also put more of an effort into like making it little baby steps for them to go off of; so they could can also get better themselves without feeling like they're just getting nagged on all of the time.

Also under teacher factors, coded for this interview with Mary, was teacher expectations. When Mary was asked to share her experiences here in the high school she shared that "It was a lot harder and the teachers in the high school they expected more out of you; so then it was a lot harder and a lot more pressure on that too." Mary also referred to teacher expectations when being asked about her writing compared to when she was in junior high and her response was "Since then being older than the Jr. high then they also just like getting older and closer to college they (teachers) expect you to use bigger words and to use better punctuation and everything else that's in that field."

The interpretive code psychological factors that related to family support was also evident as Mary shared that one way she sought help outside of school to help with her literacy was through family support. Mary stated she:

Mainly talked to my parents or my sister or older people that I had in my life cause I know that sometimes they did the same things that I did when they were my age so I kind of looked to them and learned from them. So, I just looked to them for guidance and they just kind of helped me not do certain things that would not

like help me in the literacy field, but they would also like just push me to the point where I knew what I had to do to get certain work done and to get stronger ability in the literacy.

Case 3 – George

George, an Asian male, who had only been in the United States for three years and his first language was not English. He was in the United States with his father who had moved here for him to have the ability to go to a school to learn English. He also shared that in his country he was not able to go to a regular school since he had been in baseball school so there was not really an opportunity for him since he did not stay in baseball school. “I play baseball, I mean if you play any sport in [country of origin] you do not go to school so you just basically you just go to baseball school.” He was planning to stay in the United States to go to college. I did not have George in class as a student, but I saw him on a regular basis since his ELL classroom was across the hall from my classroom. This close proximity allowed for a rapport as I was not a stranger to George and he would also see his ELL teacher and myself working together to help other students that we shared. George’s narrative is as follows:

My name is [name removed], a high school student who from [name of country removed] 3 years ago. I am glad to help your final project to finish your EDD degree. In this story, I am going to write about my own experiences throughout high school where I encountered difficulties with literacy also outside of school as well and how to improve, what had helped me to find success in school in terms of my literacy experiences.

I have been here for almost 3 years and half, came here with my father. My father and I didn't know how to speak, read, and write an English. We had really hard time since we moved to United State because literacy. Simple things were so hard for us to understand and had gotten a stress from literacy. Such as: contract for a house, buy a car, get an insurance, apply for school, and thousand of the other stuffs.

I had to study and prepare to what I am going to say to someone when I go to outside to do the above things.

So I had to look a dictionary to memory what I am going to say, and prepared to understand what they are going to say as well. Therefore, I was willing to studying and English myself.

I think that was one way to improve my literacy abilities.

For someone who is second- language learned, or anyone who is trying to learn a language that is not their own native language, they need to hear over and over what they are going to learn that language. That's why I came here because I knew that moving to United State is going to help me a lot to improve English literacy. Then why am I learning English?

Here is answer, English is a universal language and is spoken in many countries in the world. English provides the medium for all the cultures to communicate through books, movies, plays, internet or other resources. Many companies in today's time require their employees to be well versed with English, so that they can communicate with the company's international clients.

In school, I had hard time to make a friend, get a good grade, and studying the other subject that is not English such as: America history, science, and others.

Making a friend was not really hard for me because I was young, my personality was pretty open like Americans.

However, getting a good grade was difficult for me since English is second language. I had to study double and look a machine dictionary over and over again.

My father had bought an English – [name removed] machine dictionary for me, so I have brought the dictionary anywhere, where I go, to find a word that I can't understand.

That was second way to improve my literacy abilities.

And in the United State, the most high school has ELL (The English language learner) or ESL (The English as a Second Language).

The class helps a lot for someone who is trying to new language. ESL classes are usually small. So I learn from being exposed to language which is comprehensible to me. It is unrealistic to expect the other close attention to large chunks of spoken English which is not modified for my needs or supported by visual material. Idioms, colloquialisms, euphemisms and jargon are likely to be incomprehensible to me. And I listen more carefully if I feel personally involved. You could do this in a science lesson by avoiding the typical use of the passive. So, for example, instead of saying: After being swallowed the food passes into the stomach, where it is further broken down by the strong stomach muscles, you could say After you swallow your food, it passes into your stomach where strong muscles break it down further.

That was third way to improve my literacy abilities.

And in my opinion, the most important thing to improve English is open your mind as start new life.

That were all my experiences during 4 years in the United States how to improve my English.

Achievement data analysis. In looking at George's achievement data there was no record of an ACT Plan score. One could speculate on the reasons for this, but it is possible that since George was new to the school and new to the United States that they did not test him since at that time he did not speak English and the results would not have been as valid. George did not participate in the ACT Prep classes. George had a SRI Lexile score of 180 his sophomore year, which was considered to be below grade level, as can be seen on Table 1 (p. 96). Since there was no ACT Plan score and only the SRI Lexile score, which was very low, George was identified as a struggling reader. In looking at George's SRI Lexile score for his senior year it shows the same score of 180, which is unusual if their skills are improving.

This left me questioning the validity of the SRI Lexile scores, which were the scores in George's permanent record, but left questions regarding how the test was administered and whether modifications were allowed in the testing due to the language barrier, since George spoke two languages.

The next two sections on Table 2 pertain to results from the ACT test and it was reported that George did take the test more than once. George's lowest ACT score was a 16 and his highest score was a 28. George showed a vast improvement from his lowest ACT score to his highest. George's highest ACT score was much higher than the school goal of 20, which does demonstrate that his reading did greatly improve from when he first came to the United States his sophomore year.

George's GPA was 3.269 and his class rank was 249 out of 478 students. George's GPA did meet the criteria of this study to demonstrate that he was successful by attaining a

GPA of at least a 2.5 or higher. In looking at all of George's achievement data knowing the progress he made to achieve the ACT score of 28 and an ending GPA of 3.269 it is very apparent that George was striving to overcome his struggles with literacy.

Narrative analysis.

Self-efficacy. This theme was evident in George's narrative. In George's narrative he only included the aspects of self-image. George wrote "I didn't know how to speak, read, and write an English," which clearly demonstrated a lack of self-confidence during his sophomore year due to not being able to speak the English language, which clearly relates to his struggle with acquiring English. Even with not knowing the language when he first came to the United States by his senior year his comment "English is open your mind as start new life," clearly illustrates an increase in his self-confidence as George was progressing toward learning English.

Personal experiences. This theme was evident in George's narrative and fit the interpretive code of outside influences, defined by both personal obstacles and childhood influences. George stated "I had a hard time to make a friend," which was a statement he made in regards to when he first arrived in the United States and it fits outside influences, specifically personal obstacles because over time he did make friends and this was something that was in his control. At one point in his narrative it was a little confusing because he said it was hard to make friends, but then in another statement he said it was easy to make friends. In reading through his narrative these conflicting statements might be because of a lapse of time since George was writing about his three years in the United States. A childhood influence for George can be seen in this statement "I have been here for almost 3 years and half, came here with my father. We had really hard time since we moved to United State

because literacy.” He faced a very difficult time of moving from one country to another with the added obstacle of not speaking the language of the country he was moving to. Even though George was a teenager, this type of change in where one lives still fit the childhood influences and it definitely does affect their education as they often have to make adjustments to the new learning environment.

In regards to the interpretive code of academic challenges George did mention that it was hard for him to get good grades. His specific statement was “However, getting a good grade was difficult for me since English is second language.” This was the only reference to any academic challenges in George’s narrative.

Literacy skills. Literacy skills were the third theme that was defined by six literacy strategies which included thinking, verbal communications, written communications, listening, reading ability, and asking questions. In George’s narrative he mentioned four specific literacy strategies which were thinking, reading, writing, and speaking. George’s following statement references literacy skills he used:

I had to study and prepare to what I am going to say to someone when I go to outside to do the above things (contract for a house, buy a car, get an insurance, apply for school, and thousand of the other stuffs). So I had to look a dictionary to memory what I am going to say, and prepared to understand what they are going to say as well. Therefore, I was willing to studying an English myself.

He wrote about reading from his dictionary, thinking about what he wanted to say and being able to understand what they say awhile also studying the words and planning what he needed to say so he could say them to someone when he went out to take care of things.

Influential factors. This last theme was related to outlying factors that were important and included the three interpretive codes of student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors was evident for George. George actually mentioned two of these

influential factors, both of which were psychological factors, in his writing. First he mentioned stress in his statement “We had really hard time since we moved to United State because literacy. Simple things were so hard for us to understand and had gotten a stress from literacy.” Not only does he specifically use the word stress, but he stated how hard it was for them when they first came to the United States. The second factor that applied for George was teacher assistance. George stated:

And in the United State, the most high school has ELL (the English language learner) or ESL (The English as a Second Language). The class helps a lot for someone who is trying to new language. ESL classes are to me.

Although he did not specifically mention his teacher he mentioned that the ‘class’ helped a lot as he was trying to learn a new language. In the ELL/ESL classroom there are usually five or less students with one teacher, which provides more one-on-one assistance with their learning.

Interview analysis.

Self-efficacy. A theme that was evident throughout the study for George was self-efficacy. Within the interpretive code of socialization, both peer relations and aspirations/goals were identified for this interview. Peer relations was evident as George made several references to peers and/or friends as demonstrated through the following statements he made such as “hanging out with my friends” and he also referred to his ‘church friends.” George mentioned his church friends several times, that he goes to church almost every day, and that when he moves to St. Louis there will be a larger group of [removed nationality] at the church there, which resonated that the contact with other [removed nationality] was important to him.

Also evident during the interview in regards to socialization was aspirations/goals. One aspiration/goal that George shared is his desire to continue his education after high school. George stated that he plans “two years college first, because I have A+ program and I think that I’m going to spend at community college first then transfer St. Louis.” George continued by saying:

Like I want to try something that I never happened. Before it was English and next step is going to college and going to get a good job and I want to be powerful person in this country or in this world.

When asked if he had any idea what he would like to study George’s reply was “I was thinking about doctor and engineer or businessman or journalism. So it was like a lot I was changing a lot of times, but I still don’t know yet.” While undecided he definitely has aspirations and goals for his future and seeking further levels of education.

The second interpretive code for self-efficacy, self-image, was also evident in the interview with George. For self-image, George’s lack of self-confidence was evident specifically when George was asked what areas of literacy he feels he had the most difficulty with. George responded with “I want to try something, I want to say something, but I cannot talk that looks different person.” I asked if he meant that he knows what he wants to say, but George was having difficulty finding the right word to which he responded “Yes and then I feel like oh I’m stupid.” This definitely shows a lack of self-confidence and his struggles with the English language. While discussing his literacy abilities now compared to three years ago he first mentioned that three years ago he was scared and that he could not go places or talk to people due to not speaking the language. In response to the question of comparing his abilities now to three years ago George continued with “Compared to now I can do whatever I want now. I can read. I can communicate with them. I can share my

express like my feeling.” This definitely demonstrated and increase in his self-confidence as he was demonstrating his confidence in the abilities he had developed over the past three years in terms of the use of the English language.

Personal experiences. The second theme, personal experiences, had two interpretive codes, response to academic experience and outside influences, both of which were coded for the interview with George. For response to academic experiences both challenging academic experience and accomplishments were coded for this interview. Challenging academic experiences was evident multiple times throughout the interview. In regards to challenging academic experiences one statement George made was “It was hard, I had to go back, I mean after school I had to study for English for extra.” In another statement it was confusing because George began saying math was easy, but then that it was difficult when asked what he thought was his strongest subject in school. George’s response was:

Math, because it’s really hard in [removed country] and when I come back here and take a class it’s so easy because when I was middle school I took college algebra, but that college algebra is general . . . but here it’s more difficult class.

Accomplishments were evident, but George never really acknowledged on his own the accomplishments that he made other than when he stated that “Yes I can read, I can communicate with them, I can share my express like my feeling.” When I mentioned the fact that he had succeeded in terms of graduating from high school and being able to go on to college and that I hoped he was proud of himself he replied “Yeah a little bit.” George seemed shy to discuss this, but did thank me for the compliment.

The second interpretive code for personal experiences, outside influences, was evident, but only in personal obstacles and childhood influences. The personal obstacles that were found mainly focused on the adjustments that George had to make due to coming to a

new school in a new country. George mentioned one adjustment he had to make was to the “new school systems.” Another personal obstacle was his fear which is evident when he stated “Three years ago I could not even go gas station because I was scared to, you know scared to talk and could not go hanging out with my friends, I mean American friends.” When I asked him to explain why he could not hang out with his American friends George said it was “because literacy.” I asked if he meant because he could not communicate and he said “yeah.” George also stated it “. . . was hard cause sometimes you really miss your country and friend and family.” It was clear that George had many adjustments to make in adjusting to the new setting he encountered when he came to the United States.

Due to George not being from America and not speaking English when he first came to America the narrative code of outside influences, specifically childhood influences, definitely resonated throughout this interview with George. When I asked George what being in school, here in America, was like for him his response was “First one year everything’s going fast because everything is new. New friend, new teacher, new school systems, and of course English.” When talking about some of the struggles he had due to not speaking English as his first language George stated “The translation that makes it more difficult.” When George was telling me about how there are different cultures and systems in [removed country] and the United States he tried to give an example of how some things in [removed country] are not used in the United States and so that makes it more difficult. During this exchange George used a few words that I could not understand, which was directly related to the translation issue since he could not think of the English words and I do not speak [removed language]. While getting to know George I was amazed at the accomplishments he

had made over a three year period from so many obstacles in outside influences that he had to deal with that none of the other participants did.

Literacy skills. The third theme of literacy skills with the interpretive code of (literacy) strategies was also evident in the interview with George. All six of the literacy strategies were evident during George's interview. When asked to identify the literacy skills that he felt he was strongest in George replied reading and thinking. Through questioning why he felt reading was one of his strongest skills George said "I have to read a lot," even though he did say he did not like his English class because of the amount of reading. When I asked, trying to clarify, why he thought reading was a stronger skill for him I asked if it was easier because he could see the words and his reply was "Yes." George also mentioned that he uses [removed language]/English dictionary to look up words he does not know, but he also said he does not use it as much now ". . . because when I see sentence I can guess what the word is the meaning so now I am kind of guessing and check." George also mentioned that for thinking it is a skill he uses since "It's like when I am in school I'm thinking in English in my brain, but when I go out of school I'm thinking in [removed language] you know." I also George to identify literacy strategies that he felt he was weakest in. The weaknesses George identified included listening and verbal communication. For listening George stated:

How well really closely like you know if you go to regular class you sit there and you have to listen what teachers saying, but it's fast right. So fast for me it was hard to catch what was homework, what is going to be on the test, you know.

For verbal communication George demonstrated this was a weakness when he said "I want to try something I want to say something, but if I cannot talk that looks different person." To clarify I asked if he meant having difficulty finding the right word and he said "Yes."

Written communication was identified as a strategy George used in both languages, [removed language] and English. George mentioned “I think you will never forget your first language even if you stay in the other country,” but then he shared an experience that demonstrated that he did actually forget some of the [other language] words. George said:

Like a few minutes ago I’ll actually it was yesterday was [removed country] Mother’s Day; so I had to, not had to but wanted to write my letter to my mother, but I forgot some words like what was it and I had to look like dictionary.

The last (literacy) strategy of asking questions was briefly mentioned when he stated “When I have a question when I miss something I just I went to the class teacher and asked them and then they answer me like kindly like friendly.” This was the only time George mentioned using the strategy of asking questions throughout the interview.

Influential factors. The fourth theme, influential factors, had all three interpretive codes identified in this interview. This theme was very definite in the interview with George and it was most obvious in teacher assistance under the interpretive code of teacher factors, work ethic under student input, and other sacrifices under psychological factors. Teacher assistance was the most evident as George frequently mentioned Mrs. [name removed], his ELA/ELL teacher, and when asked what the biggest impact his teachers had on his success with literacy he replied “Mrs. [name removed].” When I asked him how she helped him George replied:

ELA teacher can explain why, but I mean like if I look like one sentence I probably know what its information you know, what they’re talking about because it English; so it’s different words so they can explain the teacher can explain me different from vocabulary words.

I asked him if any other teachers helped him and George said “Yes sometimes not though.” George did not specify any specific teachers that did not help him; he would only give credit

for the most help from his “ELL” teacher. I asked him if he thought the ELL/ELA classes were a benefit to him over being in regular classes and George said:

Depend on like I think if you taking too much time spent with Mrs. [name removed] you are not going to challenge yourself because you know people like to rely and easy things you know. Sometimes you have to do hard things and realize your levels. So I think like yeah how ELL doesn't really benefit for me, but sometimes I felt like if I took more talented class right that was freshman year senior year I might be like better maybe, but maybe not.

So I asked George if he thought more challenges would be good and his response was “If you have too much challenge you're going to get really stressed and and you're going to quit like so you have to have balance.” A suggestion George gave to help teachers that would help them to help students with their literacy was:

First like understand them, why they cannot read or write; think then to talk to them closely and kind, you know cause they're scared. Scared of literacy and you have to figure out why they are scared of that and then figure out why.

Another benefit George felt when getting assistance from his ELL teacher was the class size. George said “For ELL class classes usually is small so ELA teacher can explain.” I asked if he meant that he received more help because he sometimes was the only one in the ELL/ELA classroom compared to in a regular class with the other students and George said “Yes.”

For the interpretive code of student input identified during this interview was work ethic. George mentioned that “After school I had to study for English for extra,” just as he wrote he had to “study double” demonstrating that he would put in extra effort outside of school to improve his literacy skills. It was clear from George's comments that he knew he needed to put in extra effort in order to be successful.

For the interpretive code psychological factors it was identified by other sacrifices, which refers to sacrifices from others for the student in their educational endeavors. This is clearly evident when George talked about his family. I asked him what he thought made him want to be successful and he said:

Basically for my family, because they sacrificed for me like three years to let me come here and study English for the future, because when I come back to [removed country] later I can speak two language really good you know.

I asked if he thought that will help him. And George said:

“Yeah and better educational because there’s good schooling in United States that there is an [removed country] and that’s why I think I study hard and I’m going to study hard; you know when I go to college because of my family.”

Case 4 - Lucy

Lucy, a Caucasian female, who comes from a single-parent household. She is the oldest child with other children ranging from school age to toddler. She did mention her father and that he had another family and that her stepmom was African-American. She did state that she does spend time with her father and his family, but that she lives with her mom. Throughout my interactions with Lucy she seems to be very determined and self-advocates for herself. I met Lucy in January of her senior year when she was enrolled in one of my classes. Even though I only knew Lucy for her last semester of high school I was able to build a stronger rapport due to the very small size of the class. Lucy always demonstrated a very positive attitude regardless of the task given to her in class. Here is Lucy’s narrative:

Literacy is not just the ability to read, write and speak a language, but it is also defined as listening, viewing, thinking, speaking, reading, writing and expressing oneself, which is why everyone is their own person. They do their own things such as

play basketball or softball, football or baseball, are involved in chess club or FCCLA. They believe in their own Religion, have different ways of studying the ways they feel comfortable. Everyone is different and that is what make this world unique. My literacy includes playing softball and basketball, this year I was a senior on Junior Varsity, this troubled me because being a senior who has played I all four years of high school ball, felt that I deserved to be on Varsity. I also play spring/summer ball and the coach makes all of us feel like we are awesome. For example, when I make a good play or hit a triple I feel like I have done something so incredible and think, “If the high school coaches could only see me play.” But I push the thoughts away and remember I just play because I love the game!

Being a senior this year, I have realized I am going to miss school. Being in high school makes me have the feeling that I do not have to grow up just yet, but I can still have my mommy make me grilled cheeses or drive with my mom to my goes. Graduating means you have to grow up and become more independent, more depending on yourself instead of other people. When I struggled with math I knew that I would have to work ten times harder than everyone else. I have never been good at math, always needing extra help and to be in the slower classes. Going to college I freak myself out thinking about it but I am so excited. Recently, I found out that I will be playing softball as well as received a scholarship to play at [name removed] Community College. With this information, I am so excited to attend college. Also, I know I am going to have to work super hard to do well in all my classes as well as keep my grades up. My support group of family and my closest friends will help me achieve this as well as believing in myself. So you see literacy is

found everywhere, inside and outside of school. There are just different levels of literacy. Elementary literacy where you first start learning your numbers, alphabet and manners, then there is Middle school and Junior high literacy where you start to learn how to walk to different classes instead of being stuck in one all day, without being late I might add. Then, you move up to junior high literacy that prepares you for High school, where everything big and exciting is about to happen. This is where not only the teachers or your family prepares you for the real world, but you prepare yourself. Once you are out of high school you maybe move on to college where literacy is the most important. Just know that wherever you may go, literacy is always going to be a big part of your and your life.

Achievement data analysis. In looking at Lucy's achievement data it showed that she scored a 14 on the ACT Plan. Lucy did also participate in the ACT Prep classes. As for Lucy's SRI Lexile score her sophomore year she had an 1123, which can be seen on Table 1 (p. 96) as above grade level. Due to her ACT Plan being in the range targeted for struggling readers, but her SRI Lexile score not being in range input from her Communication Arts teacher was sought for identification purposes. In looking at Lucy's SRI Lexile score for her senior year it shows a score of 987, which is a drop from her sophomore year. This drop is considered to be unusual; especially if their skills are improving; however, this gave credence to her identification as a struggling reader.

The next two sections of Table 2 pertain to results from the ACT test and it was reported that Lucy did take the test more than once. Lucy's lowest ACT score was a 15 and her highest score was a 16. Lucy did not show much improvement between her two ACT scores and they were still lower than the school goal of 20.

Lucy's GPA was 3.571 and her class rank was 178 out of 478 students. Lucy's GPA did meet the criteria of this study to demonstrate that she was successful by attaining a GPA of at least a 2.5 or higher. In looking at all of Lucy's achievement data the fluctuations in her scores creates more questions as to her true literacy abilities and it makes me question whether she will be ready for the college level classes.

Narrative analysis.

Self-efficacy. For Lucy this theme included the interpretive code of self-image defined by self-confidence. Lucy's narrative did not include any examples that would demonstrate a lack of self-confidence as Lucy did not share any negative examples that would demonstrate lacking self-confidence in her writing. She did definitely share examples that demonstrated self-confidence, which can be seen in her statement "My support group of family and my close friends will help me achieve this as well as believing in myself." Lucy's lack of negativity shows a strong sense of self-efficacy through her positive thoughts and actions.

The interpretive code of academic experiences was defined by challenging academic experiences and accomplishments, which Lucy openly admitted having struggles with Math in school. She stated "When I struggled with Math I knew that I would have to work ten times harder than everyone else." She was also open to sharing accomplishments such as "Recently I found out that I will be playing softball as well as received a scholarship to play at [name removed] College." Her accomplishment was not just academically, by earning a scholarship, but also athletically by being accepted to play softball at the collegiate level.

Literacy skills. Literacy skills were the third theme that was defined by six literacy strategies. Lucy did not specifically include any examples related to this theme in her

narrative. Throughout her narrative she referred to using literacy, but in unique ways such as when playing sports, which one could assume is verbal communication, but this was not specified in Lucy's story.

Influential factors. This last theme of outlying factors that were important included three interpretive codes which were student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors. Lucy made statements that directly related to teacher factors, which can be seen in Lucy's statement when she referred to teachers helping students, however, she also inferred a personal work ethic in her statements. Lucy said "I have never been good at math, always needing extra help and to be in the slower classes. This is where not only the teachers or your family prepares you for the real world, but you prepare yourself." Her inference to personal work ethic is when she stated that 'you' have to prepare yourself, meaning that it takes personal effort to achieve. Neither of the other two interpretive codes related to the narrative written by Lucy.

Interview analysis.

Self-efficacy. The first theme, self-efficacy, was evident during the interview with Lucy, however, only the second interpretive code of self-image applied. For the interpretive code of self-image only self-confidence and self-advocacy were identified. Lucy demonstrated a self-confidence when asked to compare herself, specifically her literacy abilities, now to when she first came to this building as a sophomore and Lucy said "They've gotten stronger. Lucy also mentioned that it is important to "be positive." Lucy referred to being positive because she said ". . . that being positive is a big part of it (asking for help) cause if you get frustrated you need to discover why or give up and not do it." Keeping a

positive attitude does demonstrate an element of having self-confidence, and definitely a sense of self-efficacy.

The second element of self-image that was evident was self-advocacy. Lucy demonstrated this when answering the question about experiences in school that helped her the most with her literacy skills. Lucy mentioned asking for help from teachers and she stated “You have to speak up. You can be shy or scared and you have to have questions.” During the interview I Lucy what she would do to get help with her literacy outside of school and she replied:

Get a tutor cause I know my mom doesn't understand very much school anymore; she says that was long time ago; I don't understand that. So, taking action for myself and calling someone that I know that knows the information instead of just giving up or not doing it or don't feel like it cause it's too hard.

Lucy also mentioned “. . .there's always someone that can help you, but you have to take action for yourself and go get the help.”

Personal experiences. The second theme was identified in Lucy's interview, however, only the second interpretive code of outside influences was identified. Of the outside influences personal obstacles were identified when Lucy stated “I just found it hard to stay focused on studying and trying to stay focused on what I was learning about and I had to remind myself to study to get good grades.” The factor of focusing was the only obstacle Lucy mentioned during the interview. The other factor identified for outside influences was freedom. Lucy was the only student that mentioned freedom. When I asked Lucy what it was like being in school, in general, but also in terms of academically she said “Well it was more strict . . .but there was freedom in the halls and freedom at lunch, which was

understandable.” I felt that it was important to include this for Lucy’s interview because it was how she visualized her experience in the high school.

Literacy skills. The third theme, literacy skills, has one interpretive code of (literacy) strategies. For Lucy all six literacy strategies were identified. First I asked Lucy to identify which areas of literacy she felt that she struggled with the most. Lucy first stated verbal communication in her comment “Speaking. I don’t like public speaking in front of any people. It makes me nervous.” Another example related to verbal communication Lucy gave was when asked where literacy was important in school she said “Speaking, like public speaking classes or like at the end of the year I know that I had to do a speech; that was sort of overwhelming, but I made it.” I then asked if speaking had to always be public speaking. Lucy said “No. You can just express yourself and that’s part of the literacy that’s important.” Another area of literacy that Lucy felt was a weakness was thinking. Lucy specifically demonstrated this when she said “Thinking along with trying to learn everything was kind of overwhelming at times cause if I was new at something and I was trying to learn it.” I asked Lucy what areas she felt like she experienced the most improvement in and she said “Thinking because you have to be more able to see the big picture to think about the big picture; not the little stuff.” Thinking was also the response given when I asked Lucy what she did outside of school to make sure that she was using her best skills when she stated “Just make sure I always think before I do.”

When asked about the areas of literacy that she felt were a strength Lucy identified listening. Lucy stated “Listening was always easy, but sometimes difficult if someone was trying to talk to me.” Lucy also stated that listening was a literacy skill that was important in school when she said “You have to listen to make sure you get the materials.” Lucy did not

identify writing as a strength, but she did state that she uses written communication to improve her verbal communication. Lucy stated that when she was having troubles wording something she said “Sometimes I would write it down to make sure that it came out right; then I would write it down and then say it.” Lucy also acknowledged that written communication was important in school and that she used it when taking notes and tests.

The other two literacy strategies were not identified as either a strength or weakness by Lucy, but she did state that she did read in school and that she also asked questions. Lucy specifically gave the advice to teachers that they should “. . .make sure that the students know that if they need help with something that they need to ask instead of just letting it go.” This reflects back to self-advocacy when Lucy stated you have to take action for yourself, but she also was giving this as advice to teachers to encourage their students to ask questions.

Influential factors. The fourth theme, influential factors, only had one interpretive code that was evident during this interview, which was teacher factors that consisted of both teacher expectations and teacher assistance. Teacher expectations was first evident when I asked Lucy what it was like being in school, in general, but also in terms of academically. Lucy responded “Well it was more strict. The teachers if they expected something out of you and you had to do it, make sure you do it, or else you were pretty much toast for grades.” This was the only reference to the expectations of teachers, however, Lucy referred to teacher assistance repeatedly. When asked what she thought her teachers did that she felt helped her improve her literacy the most Lucy responded “Giving homework, making sure that we knew the material before we were just handed a test; so they had us practice a lot; practice problems in math for example.” When asked if her teachers did anything else that helped Lucy said “Lecturing.” Lucy then also stated “Notes. They showed you how to take good

notes when they're giving you the lecture so that you can stay focused and pay attention to the material that they're teaching at that time." When asked about a specific teacher or class that helped her the most with her literacy Lucy said:

Freshman year my math teacher taught it slowly so that we could understand what we were doing and made sure that we knew what we were doing and did lots of examples and I always seem to get A's on everything in that class. Then high school came and I was like uhh not sure about math anymore, don't like it, don't get it. Ms. [name removed] for Comm. Arts. She's really really good at expressing how to learn something and how to read it and how to write a good paper with details. So is Mrs. [name removed], she was really good at helping you edit your papers before you turned them in and very helpful with that.

When asked what suggestions she would give to her teachers to help students improve their literacy Lucy suggested "Making sure that like teachers talking one-on-one if you didn't understand something that really helped and that benefited me a lot because I know that with math I didn't always get it so I would go and have one-on-one time." I then asked Lucy if she ever felt like her teacher's didn't help her with her literacy and Lucy said "Not really. I feel like if I asked and they would stop what they were doing and wait till they could help." Lucy also suggested to teachers "Letting them know that they're there for them, that one-on-one time, but if they need more examples to let them know, make sure that the students know that if they need help with something that they need to ask."

Case 5 - Jane

Jane, a Caucasian female, who came from a two parent household. She did mention that she has an older sister, who is in college, but did not mention any other siblings. She also shared that she has a disability, Central Processing Disorder, which was not fully acknowledged and explored until she was in high school. Jan mentioned that she is easily distracted due to her disability, which makes it hard for her to focus. Central Processing

Disorder, as referred to by Jane, is actually Auditory Processing Disorder, which can also be referred to as Central Auditory Processing Disorder. This disorder is defined as the inability for children to process the information they hear because ears and brains do not fully coordinate because something adversely affects the way the brain recognizes and interprets sounds and usually occurs when there is background noise which is when the basic difficulty of understanding speech signals occurs

(http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/ears/central_auditory.html). I met Jane her Junior year when she was a student in my class. I did not have her in class her senior year, but due to the rapport that we had established her junior year she would come visit me throughout her senior year. Here is Jane's narrative:

Graduating with a 3.5 grade point average is a huge accomplishment for someone with Central Auditory Processing Disorder. That someone would be me. You might ask, what is Central Auditory Processing Disorder? I will give you the short version. Central Auditory Processing Disorder is a Disorder that slows down the way you process things. No when you talk to me you cannot tell I have a disorder. The only thing you might notices is that I kind of sound like I am from Britain or something and hey you can keep thinking that!

With this Disorder my High School Career [career] has been one tough ride, I have had to work 10 times harder to get where I am today. Difficulties that I have had with this in High School would be when we would be in class and the teacher would be explaining something to the class and I wouldn't understand it. My sophomore year I was afraid to do anything about it so I just let it be and tried my best but now that I am a senior I have slowly accepted the fact that the teacher might

have to explain things to me in a different way so I needed to ask questions and not be afraid.

Another way it has been difficult would be when people are talking to me. When I am trying to focus on listening or writing down notes with background noise it gets very hard for me to focus on what I need to be working on because I can't listen to two different things. The difficulty in hearing, processing, and then writing the notes teachers give me. Central Processing Disorder delays being able to understand what I am hearing. This is one difficulty that I have had to work around because I had no control over the background noise.

Central Processing Disorder also affects my speech. It is common for people to think we have British accents. This bothered me at first and still does a little when people don't understand what I said because I try to say it again but they still do not understand, but now I have learned to have fun with it and sometimes tell people that I am from Britain if they ask which is often.

I am grateful for the support my teachers have given me. My teachers made sure I actually understood what was getting taught and made time for me to stay after school if I needed extra help. Without my teachers support it would make school so much more difficult.

There were times where I just wanted to give up but I am proud to say that this Central auditory Processing Disorder made me a stronger person and I am graduating High School and moving on to the next step of my life at College.

Achievement data analysis. In looking at Jane's achievement data it showed that she scored a 14 on the ACT Plan. Jane did also participate in the ACT Prep classes. Jane's SRI

Lexile score her sophomore year she was an 854, which can be seen on Table 1 (p. 96) as below grade level. Due to her ACT Plan being in the range targeted for struggling readers and her SRI Lexile score being below grade level she was identified as a struggling reader. In looking at Jane's SRI Lexile score for her senior year it shows a score of 1103, which is an improvement over her sophomore year. This improvement still did not bring Jane to the level considered to be college and career ready, but for her junior year it would have put her at grade level, which as previously stated is a year where the students are not tested; so this leaves the question of whether Jane had attained a reading level that would have been at grade level her junior year or if it was not until her senior year that she reached this level. By not attaining the college and career ready level of expectation this again opens the question of whether Jane will need remedial courses when she goes to college.

The next two sections of Table 2 pertain to results from the ACT test and it was reported that Jane did take the test more than once. Jane's lowest ACT score was a 16 and her highest score was a 20, which did meet the school's goal. This leads one to the question of how beneficial the ACT prep classes were in helping Jane to meet the score of 20.

Jane's GPA was 3.214 and her class rank was 257 out of 478 students. Jane's GPA did meet the criteria of this study to demonstrate that she was successful by attaining a GPA of at least a 2.5 or higher. In looking at all of Jane's achievement data knowing the progress she made to achieve the ACT score of 20 and an ending GPA of 3.214 it is very apparent that Jane was striving to overcome her struggles with literacy despite her Central Auditory Processing Disorder.

Narrative analysis.

Self-efficacy. For Jane this theme included the interpretive code of self-image defined by self-confidence, which was present in Jane's narrative. Jane included statements that encompassed both self-confidence and a lack of self-confidence which are evident in her statements. "There were times where I just wanted to give up," which definitely demonstrates a lack of self-confidence. Similar to the other participants her next statement refers to her senior year and an example of increased self-confidence. "Now that I am a senior I have slowly accepted the fact that the teacher might have to explain things to me in a different way so I needed to ask questions and not be afraid."

Personal experiences. The theme of personal experiences had two interpretive codes, academic experiences and outside influences. In Jane's narrative Outside influences were demonstrated through personal obstacles and childhood influences. Personal obstacles are things that stand in the way of the individual, but they are something the person can overcome. Childhood influences are things that occurred in childhood that can affect ones development, such as disabilities and a lack of language, which can be overcome to a degree, but not always are these able to be completely done away with.

Jane demonstrated both personal obstacles and childhood influences. A personal obstacle for her was evident in the following statement.

Another way it has been difficult would be when people are talking to me. When I am trying to focus on listening or writing down notes with background noise it gets very hard for me to focus on what I need to be working on because I can't listen to two different things.

The personal obstacle was background noise that made it hard for her to focus, but with practice and coping skills this was an obstacle that she could overcome. For childhood influences Jane's statement that represents childhood influences is "With this Disorder

(Central Auditory Processing Disorder) my High School Career has been one tough ride. Central Processing Disorder also affects my speech.” The disability is something that she had for an undetermined amount of time and it is an obstacle that she cannot get rid of and had to learn how to cope with it.

The interpretive code of academic experiences was alluded to when Jane mentioned she wanted to give up, but she never specifically addresses challenging academic experiences directly as can be seen in the following statement:

There were times where I just wanted to give up, but I am proud to say that this Central Auditory Processing Disorder made me a stronger person and I am graduating High School and moving on to the next step of my life at college.

It is clear that she is proud of her accomplishment of graduating from high school. She also demonstrated her pride in her accomplishments by stating “Graduating with a 3.5 grade point average is a huge accomplishment for someone with Central Processing Disorder.”

Literacy skills. Literacy skills were the third theme, defined by six literacy strategies, in which Jane mentioned listening and writing. Jane’s following statement clearly illustrates both listening and writing when she said, “I can’t listen to two different things. The difficulty in hearing, processing, and then writing the notes teachers give me.” In reading her statement again, while she is referring to her disability and the need to process, this is actually also referring to thinking, which is the process that occurs when we hear something and try to understand the meaning.

Influential factors. This last theme of outlying factors was relevant to Jane’s narrative, but only through the interpretive code of teacher factors. This is evident in Jane’s following statement which directly applied to the teacher factor, specifically of teacher assistance:

I am grateful for the support my teachers have given me. My teachers made sure I actually understood what was getting taught and made time for me to stay after school if I needed extra help. Without my teachers support it would make school so much more difficult.

She stated that it was the support of her teachers that actually helped her to be successful and she gave them the credit for helping her even outside of school hours to help her understand the materials being taught.

Interview analysis.

Self-efficacy. The first theme, self-efficacy, has two interpretive codes, socialization and self-image, both of which do apply to this interview. The interpretive code of socialization, peer relations and aspirations/goals, was relevant in regards to Jane's interview. Jane did not really relate any situations that reflected peer relations except in comparing her abilities to others that she would refer to as 'friends.' As for aspirations/goals, which Jane did demonstrate, was evident when she mentioned just wanting to give up and I asked her what kept her from giving up. Jane's reply was:

My education, my future cause I knew that if I gave up that I wasn't going to go anywhere like I needed to keep trying or I would be disappointed in myself giving up and having that on my reputation like oh she gave up like she has F's in everything. I knew that to make me happy that I had to push.

The second interpretive code for self-efficacy was self-image which includes self-confidence and self-advocacy both of which were identified during this interview. Self-confidence was very evident through the repeated coding. Jane made several comments that reflected the lack of self-confidence which include:

I wish that I was more prepared a lit bit cause I'm afraid that when I go to college that I'm not going to know as much.
My senior year I didn't have to write any papers and so I'm kind of afraid for that part coming up into college.

If I wasn't doing good in a class and I just couldn't understand it I would go home and just like complain and sometimes even just like cry because I just wish I understood it.

It was just sometimes hard because like my friends are super smart and they're taking college algebra, college bio or whatever and I was just like a step back and it was like why can't I just understand it like they do. And that would be like a down point.

I was just afraid to ask any teachers any questions, I didn't want to stay after school because I didn't want to like look stupid.

Also evident was an increase in self-confidence, which was evident when Jane was asked if she saw improvement in her literacy skills as a senior compared to when she was a sophomore and Jane said "Yes." One specific example that Jane shared was "When I actually understood something in math, I'm like oh yes I finally understand what's going on. I know what's happening." Jane also express confidence in her writing, which can be seen in her statement "When I'm writing feel like I can express myself more in writing than doing something like painting or something." Jane also did state that her literacy abilities "are a lot better."

The third aspect of self-image was self-advocacy. Because of her disability and from learning what helps her to find the most success Jane self-advocates for herself and her needs. Specifically Jane said:

In college we're planning on getting like a little recorder so I could record the whole class period or something and then when I'm studying then I can listen back to it. Or we might get like a note taker for me cause like I can't write that fast.

When Jane also realized what helped in the classroom she took action. Jane stated "I know what helped me in classes and I need to usually be somewhere close to the front to the teacher, having making sure that I understand it before I do it."

Personal experiences. The second theme, personal experiences, has two interpretive codes, both of which were coded for this interview. For the first interpretive code, response to academic experience, challenging academic experience and accomplishments, were both evident during this interview. Jane stated that “My sophomore and junior year that was kind of hard for me.” Another challenging academic experience for Jane was personal finance. Jane stated “I didn’t like so much personal finance even though people said it was an easy class for them; I felt like it was a little harder for me than it was for them.” In regards to accomplishments, Jane would acknowledge an accomplishment, but not necessarily take credit for it as is shown when she said “They (her literacy abilities) are a lot better, I know that for sure. I guess I just have to give a lot of credit to my teachers.” The only other accomplishment Jane really gave referred to was her grades at the end of her senior year. Jane said “After like for my senior year I ended with A’s and B’s.”

The second interpretive code for personal experiences was outside influences. Outside influences, but only personal obstacles and childhood influences were identified as outside influences during the interview with Jane. The childhood influences were the most frequently coded, which is directly linked to the student having a disability that affected her achievement. The disorder, as shared by Jane was Central Processing Disorder, which she described as a delay in her processing what she sees and hears. Even when having difficulty in a class, she did not put all the blame on her disorder. Jane stated “I don’t know it’s just I don’t want to blame it on my processing disorder cause I don’t think that’s is. It’s just that it took me a little bit more to understand things in that class.” When asking her to clarify I asked her what it is like when she is trying to take notes, but because of her processing disorder she is not really processing the information, does it delay how she takes in the

information and the ability to write it down. Jane responded “Umm it takes like I have to read it and then write it. It takes me longer.” Jane also shared how the Central Processing Disorder affects her speech. She said:

Somehow on this thing the Central Processing Disorder it has something to do with the way I talk, but I’m not 100 percent sure why. Cause we would read articles and they would get asked if they were from Britain a lot and that’s what I get a lot. I get are you from a different country or something, no I’m not.

Even though Jane had this disability it was in High school when they really addressed it.

My sophomore year’s when we really went kind of into like what we found out in seventh grade that I had my whole disability thing, but we had never heard of it before and so we just kind of let it go and then my mom was talking to someone at work . . . and so then we went more deeper into that and then that clicked with a lot of things that I was happening. And sophomore year’s when we kind of took it into and experiencing what was happening, and like how we could make that better in the classroom.

The next part of outside influences that was identified was personal obstacles, however, this first example crosses over into both personal obstacles and childhood influences since it deals with a problem with peers and her disability. Jane shared:

Sometimes when I’m like having a serious conversation with one of my friends and that I have something to say, but couldn’t, like I didn’t know how to put it in words and so like sometimes it would just have to be unsaid because I didn’t know how to say it. And so I’ve been trying to work on like how to say things like words that I need to use, but I don’t know like how to process them to say them; cause sometimes there are our words, but I don’t want to say and I know that I can’t say that so I’m not going to say that; so I have to try to find different words to explain it.

One problem that Jane experiences, that is a personal obstacle, is how it becomes a problem for her when multiple people are talking and she is trying to have a conversation it is sometimes difficult for her to have that one-on-one conversation due to background noise.

This is specifically a problem for Jane at work. Jane works in a restaurant as a hostess and she is expected to talk to the people waiting to be seated Jane shared this experience:

Sometimes when there's a long wait like when there are a lot of people there up at the door I tried to get over (pause), cause I have I'm trying to focus on this, but then there's all that background noise of people talking and so it's hard for me to focus.

When this happens Jane said that sometimes she will trade places with someone and go bus tables so she can get away from all the noise.

Literacy skills. The third theme, literacy skills, has one interpretive code of (literacy) strategies. For this interview all six literacy strategies were evident. When describing her disorder Jane said "I just have to think a little bit longer," which falls under the strategy of thinking. Jane also mentioned twice during the interview how people tell her she thinks too much. When asked what areas of literacy she felt she had the most difficulty with thinking was one Jane listed. Jane also gave an example where a teacher helped her how to think about a word and its definition for clearer understanding. Jane shared that the following example:

...there's a word inflation and I think of like in-fa-la-tion. I think of like something growing, but in moneywise it's like the value of money decreasing; so I just had to think like if the opposite. And so that's what she kind of just told me just like think of that way, but the opposite of that.

Other literacy areas Jane has difficulty with include listening and speaking. Jane described being distracted due to background noises while trying to listen, which made it hard for her to focus. Jane also mentioned having this problem during one-on-one conversations, but also at work when wearing a headset, where voices were coming through, and trying to talk to the people in front of her. In regards to speaking being a weakness, Jane

said “I had to work on speaking and like talking to people.” Jane referred to this not only for her photojournalism class, but also at work.

When asked what literacy areas she felt were a strength for her Jane replied “Writing.” Jane stated this was a strength because “I like writing papers.” Jane did however admit that she would have difficulty when writing down information because during a class the teacher would go to the next slide in a Power Point, but she would not have finished writing down the information from the previous slide. Even while admitting writing takes her longer, she does enjoy writing and “When I’m writing I feel like I can express myself more in writing” and “I have a little prayer journal that I write in every single night.”

The other two literacy strategies are reading ability and asking questions. Both of these were mentioned by Jane, but she did not identify either as a strength or weakness. Jane does mention that she reads, even outside of school, but she does not mention reading much at school. In terms of asking Jane only mentioned this twice during the interview. The first example was when she would raise her hand to ask a question in math class, “. . . but then I would think about it for a little bit longer and I would be like okay never mind. I got it.” Jane just referred to this as needed a little longer to process things due to her disorder. The second example was “I was just afraid to ask any teachers any questions.” Jane stated that it wasn’t until her junior year when she started asking more questions.

Influential factors. The fourth theme, influential factors, of which all three interpretive codes were identified during this interview. The first interpretive code identified was psychological factors, which addressed stress and family support. Stress was evident when at one point in the interview Jane became flustered and said “Oh gosh. I can’t, I don’t understand.” So I reworded what we were discussing about personal experiences with

literacy in school and how I wanted her to give me any positive or negative examples. When Jane was struggling with this I gave her an example of when she became frustrated in a class I taught. When in Advanced Photography I would have the students read and follow a tutorial in Photo Shop, which required multiple literacy skills, if Jane would begin to struggle she would sometimes get very upset and feel stressed. Once I reminded her of this situation she agreed that was stressful.

As for family support, another aspect of psychological factors, this was first evident when Jane was describing how her mom was talking to a co-worker about Central Processing Disorder and that is when they decided to learn more about the disorder so they could make her school experiences better Jane also mentioned:

I knew that to make me happy that I had to push and I had to make my parents happy because I hate making them disappointed. . . My mom and dad were like my biggest cheerleaders in making sure they knew it got difficult, but they were always there to make sure that I had someone there for me.

This clearly demonstrated that Jane had her parents support in all her endeavors.

A second interpretive code was teacher factors, specifically teacher assistance. Jane shared that in class she would have to have the teacher come to her to show her how to do things. Jane mentioned that she needed this so she could “get like a picture image of it.” Jane also mentioned that she sometimes had to stay after school with some teachers in order to make sure that she understood what she was learning. When asked what her teachers did that had the biggest impact on her success with literacy Jane said “Giving me that extra time, like staying after school with me; making sure that I understood what was happening.” When asked if her teachers taught her any specific techniques for helping with her literacy Jane stated “Sometimes they would do like examples that I would understand kind of.” When

asked if she had any specific class or teacher that helped the most with her literacy Jane's response was "My math teacher. I had her all three years; so she kind of caught on to what I most needed help with and like how to explain things to me. So I think she helped me a lot." When asked about types of help outside of school that a student could pursue for help Jane said tutoring, but she said "I never had a tutor, but I trusted my teachers in having me stay after school; so I guess my teachers were my tutor."

A third interpretive code for influential factors that was identified was student input in regards to work ethic. Jane shared ". . .my senior year I ended with A's and B's; that's how hard I had to work . . .It just took me extra effort for me to get up to there." Jane also said "There would be times where like when I had to study for a lot of classes when finals are coming up or if like I wasn't doing good in a class." These statements clearly support the code work ethic as Jane demonstrated that she had to put in extra effort and time to succeed at school.

I found these interviews to be very enlightening in terms of the perceptions of these struggling readers. Throughout the interviews I would ask for clarification to make sure that I clearly understood what the participant was saying and so they could affirm or alter answers if they did not feel they had communicated their experiences clearly enough. From these interviews it was clearly evident that all four of the themes that were identified played a role in the perceptions the students shared during the interviews. For me the interviews were more powerful than the narratives as the interviews allowed me to contextualize the conversations and ask probing questions. It is clear to me that there is definitely a need to help these struggling readers, but to do so there will be many challenges that are often outside of the school's control, such as students moving and attending multiple of schools.

Cross-Case Analysis

This next section of this chapter is focused on a cross-case analysis where I specifically looked for similarities and differences across each case. In relation to relevant theory from the theoretical framework and other sources I found a connection between self-efficacy and academic challenges and struggling readers. Specifically the literature states that students that lack in literacy skills will often struggle academically, have a lack of self-confidence and may even drop out due to not being successful in school. According to Hock et Al. (2009) “adolescents who arrive in high school lacking a solid foundation in core reading skills have a greatly reduced probability of graduating with a standard diploma” (p. 35). It has also been suggested that struggling readers have little confidence, which is directly related to the lack of self-confidence.

Through the analysis of the achievement data, quantitatively, and the coding of the narratives and interviews I was able to see these students in a different light as it pointed out themes that helped me to gain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences with literacy. Through this deeper understanding it also brought to mind more questions that I might need to research further to see if there is documentation that might answer these questions. The overarching question for this study was: What perceptions do the participants have in regards to their literacy success? While the following research questions and sub-questions guided this study: 1) What perceptions do the participants have in regards to how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences? a) How do the students describe their literacy experiences in their high school classes, regardless of subject? b) What benefits do students identify from these classroom experiences? c) Where do students use literacy in school- specifically any setting (i.e.:

classes, library, interactions with others, etc.)? 2) What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the student's experiences with literacy? a) Where do students use literacy outside of school? b) How are literacy strategies applied outside of school? 3) What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy? 4) What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy?

The intention was to be able to explore the different perspectives of the participants regarding their literacy and their success through their descriptions of their experiences both inside and outside of school. During this study four themes were identified in all of the documents and interviews. The themes were self-efficacy, personal experiences, literacy skills, and other influential factors. It was through the identification of the themes through the documents and interviews and also through the descriptive statistics that helped to paint a picture of the students' achievement levels that allowed me to address the research questions of this study. The cross-case analysis of this study served as an instrument to highlight the findings in reference to the research questions. Because all four themes were consistent for all five of the participants, the cross-case analysis went further by analyzing the specific interpretive and descriptive codes by participant to get a more in-depth understanding. I put the findings for each case into one chart (Appendix E) to make it easier to compare each case in the cross-case analysis. Due to the nature of the themes crossing over into different questions based on how the student answered the question it does not make it possible to segregate out each question into one specific theme. In this analysis each theme will be addressed by the students' responses to each question and how the different themes emerged within each question and/or sub-question.

Self-Efficacy

During this study I defined the theme self-efficacy as the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals and they are more likely to challenge themselves and to be intrinsically motivated, while also accepting the responsibility for any failures. Students with low self-efficacy will often avoid challenging situations and often have very low aspirations. Within this theme there were two interpretive codes, self-image and socialization. Within these two interpretive codes there were a total of four descriptive codes. However, the theme self-efficacy, which occurred 97 times throughout the narratives and interviews, was the lowest of the four themes. The theme self-efficacy was evident in answers these students gave when answering several of the questions, yet unique because of the differences of each student.

Within self-efficacy the only area that all five participants related to was self-concept, while two mentioned peer relations, two aspirations/goals, and two self-advocacy. Even though all five students were identified as struggling students they all mentioned positive experiences they had in high school, which was interesting to me since they still had positive perspectives even with the many challenges they had to overcome to find success in graduating on time and with the challenge of earning GPA of 2.5 or higher.

Personal Experiences

During this study personal experiences were defined as experiences of the students individually that are connected to both inside and outside of school in the lives of these individuals. This theme included two interpretive codes, response to academic experiences and outside influences. These interpretive codes included five descriptive codes, which included challenging academic experiences, accomplishments, personal obstacles, and childhood influences and freedom. Personal experiences were coded a total of 115 times.

This theme did not surprise me since the nature of this study is asking about the personal experiences these participants had in terms of literacy experiences and since it was their perceptions that were being sought.

Within this theme all five participants aligned with both interpretive codes, however, under outside influences they all only aligned with personal obstacles. Four mentioned challenging academic experiences, two mentioned accomplishments, three mentioned childhood influences, and only one mentioned freedom. While freedom, which was only mentioned by one participant, was more of an unintended finding, I felt it was important to include in the analysis because it was how Lucy described her high school experiences. The idea freedom that Lucy shared was her perspective of how she saw the high school and her experiences as compared to when she was in junior high school. This was unusual as no other student mentioned freedom, but Lucy mentioned it more than once which led me to see that description of her experiences as important to her.

Literacy Skills

Literacy skills for this study was defined as skills that are taught through strategies in how to use literacy in multiple formats. For this theme there was only one interpretive code, which was literacy strategies, which were specific things mentioned by the participants that related to their literacy abilities. Under this one interpretive code were six strategies that including thinking, verbal communication, written communication, listening skills, reading ability and asking questions. Again this theme was coded for all five participants at a rate of 224 times. It was within this theme where the participants shared their strengths and weaknesses in relation to specific skills.

In looking at the descriptive codes enumeratively all five students included verbal communication, written communication, listening and asking questions. Reading ability was only connected to four of the participants and thinking was only connected to three.

Influential Factors

The fourth theme was influential factors, which was defined as outlying ideas that did affect the experiences of the participants in regards to this study. In the outlying ideas the interpretive codes included student inputs, teacher factors and psychological factors. Student inputs consisted of work ethic and lack of effort. Teacher factors was comprised of teacher assistance and teacher expectations. While psychological factors included stress, family and other sacrifices. All of these were factors that influenced the student, whether their success or their lack of success, and not all were out of the control of the student's actions, but some were. In looking at each case only teacher factors was coded for all five participants, specifically teacher assistance, which had the highest coding frequency of 49. Student inputs was coded for four of the participants in terms of work ethic, which directly related to their own personal efforts towards their educational endeavors, regardless of the content of the class. As for psychological factors, they were only coded for two participants, but for various factors and not consistently. While all of the interpretive codes were important factors, teacher factors, specifically in terms of teacher assistance was the one factor that all of the participants relied heavily on with their struggles with literacy. This seems to be consistent with the literature stating that many adolescents depend on their teachers because they are not able to read the textbooks (Gallagher, 2010).

In this next portion of this cross-case analysis the research questions were specifically analyzed and also compared to see where the themes fell in relation to how the participants

answered the questions. The first question was regarding the perceptions of the participants regarding how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences and actually had responses that fell into all four themes. This question had three sub-questions.

The first sub-question on how the students describe their literacy experiences in their high school classes was answered through the interviews with varied responses that depended on the individual experiences. The responses to this first sub-question related to three of the themes, but not equally for all participants. The themes were self-advocacy, personal experiences and other influential factors. Specifically for this sub-question Sally and Jane related to self-efficacy, however, not the same descriptive codes. Sally related to peer relations as she described her experiences stating that she had fun while in high school and that she did have a social life. Sally also mentioned that at times it was hard for her to focus as she found it difficult to focus with her friends in her classes. Jane's response varied as it related to self-confidence. Jane specifically described her experiences as not being totally prepared for going to college. When asked to explain Jane stated that she was afraid for college as she did not feel like she was as prepared to write papers in college because during her senior year she did not have to write any papers. This clearly shows a lack of self-confidence due to not feeling that her skills are where they need to be for her to find success at the collegiate level.

The second theme this first sub-question of question one addressed was personal experiences. Three of the participants' responses related to challenging academic experiences, two related to personal obstacles, two related to childhood influences and one related to freedom. Of the three that referred to challenging academic experiences their

answers were similar in that they referred to classes being difficult at times and that the work was more difficult at the high school level than it had been in Junior high. These responses came from Sally, Mary and George. In contrast to the challenges, the question also asked about classes the students thought were easy, George was the only one that directly referred to finding classes were easier which he described by stating that it was easy because of the homework that the teachers gave.

Other personal experiences, that all related to outside influences, that were identified through answers to this same question related directly to personal obstacles, childhood influences and freedom. Because personal obstacles are something that affects the abilities of the student, but are something they can overcome distractions in classes and even missing friends apply to this descriptive code. George was missing his friends and family. Lucy stated that she found it hard to stay focused on what she was supposed to be learning, even though she did not give any specifics that were distracting her. Connected to George's personal obstacle is also a childhood influence, something out of his control such as moving, which directly impacted his learning since he moved to the United States from [removed country]. Jane also had a childhood influences that affected her learning, which was a disability called Central Processing Disorder. Jane mentioned that because of this disorder, which slows down one's ability to process information, it was a struggle for her to understand everything that was being taught in her classes which directly affected her experiences in high school. The last response that fit freedom was by Lucy who communicated that she felt that she had more freedoms when she came to the high school. Lucy was the only student that mentioned that, but she felt very strongly that the feeling of freedom she gained at the high school did affect her education at the high school level.

The theme of influential factors was also addressed this question by three of the participants, Sally, Mary and Lucy, but their responses were all very different and all applied to different interpretive codes. First, Sally said that school was stressful to her, which fits the interpretive code of psychological factors. Second Mary's comment reflected work ethic, under the interpretive code of student inputs, in her statement that high school required more effort and that she would have to put more thought into it and actually work harder. And finally, Lucy's example related to teacher factors, specifically teacher expectations. Lucy described her experiences with teachers at the high school as the teachers were stricter and they expected more out of you. All of these experiences definitely affected their perspectives of their experiences in high school, but definitely in very different ways.

The second sub-question for question one directly related to the themes literacy skills and influential factors. This sub-question was answered through similar responses regarding strategies that their teachers' used that they felt benefitted them and these responses usually centered around assistance given by the teachers, influential factor, both during class and after school, being taught how to take notes better, the one-on-one assistance they received when they asked questions, and the homework that was given to them to help them practice the material. Lucy mentioned that her math teacher, during her freshman year, specifically used the strategy of teaching slowly so the students would understand the material and that they would do a lot of examples in class. All of the participants acknowledged that their literacy skills improved because of all of the strategies mentioned above. I found it interesting that all five were the most dependent on their teachers, even if it meant they had to see them outside of class.

The third sub-question asked where in school the students used literacy. I found it interesting that several of the interviewees mentioned math as a class that used less literacy, however, all of the students acknowledged that they use literacy every day at school and in all classes. Through further questioning they all did say that they used literacy throughout their school day specifically in the following places and/or ways:

“I don’t think there was any specific one [setting]; I think that you just kind of used it everywhere in school that I was in.”

“To my friend. To my teacher. To do my homework and tests and even if you’re eating like even if you go to lunch.”

All five students did agree that literacy was important in school and that it is used in all of their classes and throughout their day regardless of where they were in the building. As Jane stated that literacy is important “Cause without it you wouldn’t be understanding a lot of things happening.”

The second research question was: What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the students’ experiences with literacy? The two sub-questions for this question are

1. Where do students use literacy outside of school?
2. How are literacy strategies applied outside of school?

This question and its sub-questions were answered in the interviews by all of the students. The themes that connected to the varied responses included self-efficacy, specifically peer relations, and literacy skills, as the students apply specific literacy strategies outside of school. All five students did acknowledge that they used literacy outside of school through various activities that included when reading at home, writing on Facebook, socializing, extra-curricular activities, work, church, sports, driving, and communicating with family

members. These responses directly relate to literacy skills as several of these students specifically mentioned using literacy strategies through communications at work, both with the boss and with customers. Jane specifically mentioned a literacy strategy that she uses outside of school is thinking before doing. Another specific example given by George gave examples of using strategies when he goes to public places such as the gas station or grocery store. He also used a specific example of when going to an ATM and using the computer to get money. He said that when he encounters a word on the screen that he does not understand that he uses his dictionary and often then goes back to school to get a clearer understanding of the meaning of the word he encountered in the real world. Each student in their own situations did use literacy outside of school and they all found different strategies that they used to help them with their unique situations.

The third research question of this study was What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy? The main theme this related to was influential factors. Their suggestions were varied such as teachers giving more one-on-one, allowing students to ask questions when not in front of the class, teachers could ‘have done more on their part,’ less nagging and more helping – being positive, for teachers to be understanding and to talk closely to their students to determine their needs, make a connection with their students, to make learning fun and to do hands on activities rather than just teaching at the board. All of their responses directly related to the narrative code of teacher factors, under the theme of other influential factors.

The last research question was: What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy? The students again gave similar yet varied answers that fell under the themes of self-advocacy, specifically peer relations, and influential factors. They all

suggested finding a tutor, but several said they would go to friends for tutoring, peer relations, instead of a stranger, while others said they would go to their parents or relatives for help, family support. I did find it interesting that most of them said they preferred and/or trusted their teachers, and that is who they would go to for help, more than they would consider getting a tutor outside of school, whether it was a stranger, their friends or family.

Through this study all of the questions were answered and each student, who was successful by graduating on time and with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher, did acknowledge that their literacy skills had improved during their years at this Midwestern suburban high school.

In doing the cross-case analysis I also looked at the achievement data for each case and also looked for similarities and differences there also. What I found in looking at the ACT Plan scores two students did not take the ACT Plan, which could be because they were absent the day it was given, In looking at the recorded plan scores the projection for ACT scores ranged from about a 16 to a 17, which would be below the goal of the school. In the chart all of the students except for one, Lucy, scored below the range for their grade level, which means they were all at basic or below basic. Lucy was at grade level at the beginning of her sophomore year, however, she was still identified as a struggling reader due to her ACT Plan score.

When looking at the SRI Lexile scores for their senior year three of the five students' scores improved as is expected if their skills are improving. The one student whose score stayed the same was George, the Asian student who was an ELL/ELA student. Lucy's score actually declined, which is an usual occurrence unless they are struggling with their literacy skills, which gives credence as to why that student was identified as a struggling reader.

In looking at the ACT scores only two of the five met the school goal of scoring a 20 or higher. Four of the five students were reported to have taken the ACT test more than once, with three taking it twice and one taking it four times. Of the students that took the ACT Prep Classes all three did increase their ACT score when they took it again, even though only one of the three that took the ACT Prep Classes achieved the school's goal of scoring a 20 or higher on the ACT.

In looking at the achievement data, specifically the ACT scores and the GPAs, with only two of the participants meeting the school's goal of students scoring a 20 or higher on the ACT yet all of the students earning a GPA that reflects a B average it makes me question the validity of these scores. I wonder if the students that scored below a 20 on their ACT struggle when taking tests or if this is a true reflection of their abilities, or if this is a result of being over anxious. It is not uncommon for students to have anxiety issues that revolve around taking tests and this anxiety can actually reduce test performance (Jaffe, 2011, p. 131). This relates to the issues of narrowing curriculums due to the high stakes testing (Resseger, 2012, p. 1), which then causes one to ask if the scores of our students on these tests is a true representation of their abilities. Throughout this study I have become more reflective and more open to questioning the numbers in comparison to what I am able to actually observe in the classroom. Specifically this brings to mind Mary's story as her narrative regarding her experiences was not in alignment with the quality of writing that she demonstrated in class on assignments, nor do her test scores reflect the abilities that I was able to observe in the classroom. Lucy's scores are also another set that I really questioned as her SRI Lexile score her senior year shows that she is below grade level in her reading performance, but her ending GPA was the highest of all five of these participants at a 3.5

which is an A average. This brings up another question regarding the GPAs and whether they are indicative of the true performance abilities of these students. It is noted that high-school grades are considered to be inflated, meaning they are marked higher than the actual abilities of the students and often require remediation courses at the college level (Diguette, 2013; McMahon, 2004).

The last two sections in Table 2 are the ending GPA and their class rank. This class had a total of 478 students. The five students did all earn a final GPA of at least 2.5 or higher, which was one of the criterion for selecting students to be participants in this study since the intention was to show success despite their difficulties with literacy. When looking at class rankings, they really only were included to provide a picture of the level of competition these students faced to beat out their classmates. For struggling students this is not an easy task, but the real significance is in their GPAs and that all scored at least a 2.5 or higher, which equates to a B average. While their GPA does not truly embody the focus of this study, it was a criterion for the sampling and it is significant in the achievement data as it is a sign of accomplishment for these identified as students who struggled with literacy.

Summary

The purpose of this narrative bounded case study was to develop thick, rich descriptions of the literacy experiences of these students through their personal experiences and their perceptions. During the process of data collection and analysis it I truly gained new perspectives in regards to the literacy abilities of the participants. I was amazed that for all of the participants, while unique individuals with very different backgrounds and their own

literacy challenges, the themes that emerged were still similar and the only differences in the coding were in the interpretive codes that applied to each case.

First, through the documents the students communicated their thoughts and perceptions. Their writing, which included improper grammar and misspelled words, was a true indicator of their struggles with written literacy. The documents did allow me to understand the experiences that they willingly wrote about, but with others they seemed reluctant to write about specific teachers and/or experiences and wrote in more general terms.

Through the interviews I gained a more in-depth look into each individual and their struggles with literacy and their successes they found most often through their own efforts and with the assistance of their teachers. I was amazed at how most of these students did not boast about their accomplishments, but that they actually seemed more humble and gave the credit to their teachers instead of to themselves.

As a teacher in a school where the inclusion of literacy and literacy strategies is an expectation of every teacher regardless of discipline being taught, this study has brought to my attention the perspectives of the students and how they see the role of their teachers in regards to the improvement of their literacy skills and themselves. I was amazed at how these students relied so heavily on their teachers and how their teachers were the main source they saw as a means of helping them to find success with their literacy within their classes. Every teacher is entrusted with the care, teaching, and achievement of their students and this work is extremely important since these students see their teacher as their only means to finding success.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Implications of Findings

The purpose of this narrative bounded case study was to explore the different perspectives of identified struggling readers regarding their literacy experiences at a suburban high school. The intention was to discover the students' perceptions of contributing factors to their literacy success as revealed through their descriptions of their experiences both inside and outside of school. The experiences of the students were the unit of analysis for this study.

The data collected and the experiences shared through narratives and interviews with the participants were used to answer the research questions of this study, which were: What perceptions do the participants have in regards to how the literacy strategies their teachers used in their high school classes affected their experiences? What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected the students' experiences with literacy? What are student recommendations for teachers to help their students improve their literacy? and What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy?

Throughout the research process I utilized a baseline that identified and described struggling adolescent readers and a framework that focused on the participants and their personal experiences with literacy both inside of and outside of school, while keeping in mind the implications of the need for strong literacy instruction for their future. Through this study the realization that the literacy demands our students will have in regards to their future are greater now than for previous generations. This study has also led me to question and reflect on my own teaching practices and how I embed literacy within lessons and to what

extent these practices need to be altered to ensure the students are being given the best opportunities to embrace the skills they will need to be successful after high school.

Redefining Future Literacy Demands

As noted throughout this study the future of our youth is unknown due to the rapidly changing world. Many of our students at the secondary level are unable to read at the levels necessary for success (Bennett, 1998; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Ka, 2004; Kamil, 2003; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Schumaker, et al., 2006), and without the necessary literacy skills their futures are uncertain. Patrick Finn (2009) describes what life will be with and without the necessary literacy skills:

There are levels of literacy. Powerful literacy leads to positions of power and authority. It is the literacy of persons who are conscious of their own power and self-interest. Functional literacy, on the other hand, is the mere ability to meet the reading and writing demands of an average day of an average person. It is a literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome. (p. ix)

With the rapid changes to technology it is necessary, both in their personal and professional lives, that individuals acquire abilities that will enable them to identify informational needs, locate, extract, organize, and synthesize information from a variety of sources into productive uses, which will require higher-level strategies (Wopereis, Brand-Gruwel, & Vermetten, 2007, pp. 738-739). Skills and knowledge that is needed to succeed in the modern economy, and that are often referred to as 21st century skills, include “creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, personal responsibility, global awareness, social/intercultural skills, team learning, as well as mastery of rigorous academic content” (Duran, Yaussy & Yaussy, 2011, p. 104). The definition of literacy for the future is much broader and more demanding than it was for previous generations and it is also putting greater demands on the learning of literacy for our

adolescents (Abadiano & Turner, 2006, p. 60). It is important that we keep in mind that all learning is language based, which makes attention to literacy an essential part of teaching and learning (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Draper, 2010; Fisher & Ivey, 2005; Moje, 2008). These increasing demands force our students to not only be proficient with text, but also with skills and strategies that are required in a digital environment, which is the direction of the future (Anonymous, 2008; Barton, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999). This is all because of our changing world and the fact that new types of information systems, new methods for communications, presentations, and publications as well as access to technologies that support management, analyzing, developing and monitoring are already here, yet still the infusion of more technological changes worldwide is creating greater demands on literacy skills (Luke & Elkins, 2000; Rycik & Irvin, 2001). According to Deshler, Hock, and Catts (2006) students must be prepared to compete for jobs that require considerably different skills sets than most currently have (p. 1).

Reflection on Analysis of this Study

After completing this study there were four prominent themes that through the analysis of achievement data, personal narratives, and interviews expressed the experiences of the participants in this study, which were self-efficacy, personal experiences, literacy skills, and other influential factors. It was through the analysis that I was able to determine the importance of self-efficacy. We need to foster self-efficacious beliefs in our students. The stronger the students' perceived efficacy to manage their own learning, the higher their aspirations and accomplishments (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). This directly aligns with the need for positive self-confidence as it will lead to more aspirations and goals and greater accomplishments, all of which were

descriptives identified through the participants' experiences. How to increase these self-efficacious behaviors is the next question. One of the best ways is modeling, which is when changes result from observing others, and it promotes learning and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995; Schunk, 1981; Schunk & Hanson, 1985). Boosts in self-efficacy tend to lead to people trying harder to succeed (Bandura, 1995, p. 4), which is the desired result for struggling readers.

In thinking about the theme literacy skills, which students are being taught in school, our current school system often fails to put sufficient emphasis on the effective instruction and skill sets needed to access academic content beyond the primary grades (Biancarasa & Snow, 2004; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Kamil, 2003; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). It is obvious when reading the narratives and looking at the dialogue from the interviews that the participants definitely are lacking in both verbal and written communication skills. The need for our adolescents to be able to achieve the literacy levels needed to be able to read text both strategically and critically are very important (Elkins & Luke, 1999; Lenters, 2006; Snow, 2002). To achieve these levels there has to be buy-in from all, which means that this task must be taken on by all staff and not just delegated to the Communication Arts teachers.

From the analysis the most interesting theme was other influential factors because they truly painted a deeper perception into the different perspectives of the participants. One of the insights gained is how much emphasis the participants put on the assistance they received from their teachers for their success. According to Ka (2004), "many secondary students depend solely on the teacher for understanding of a text" (p. 3). So how do we as educators get our students to learn to teach themselves and to put less dependence on their teachers? I ask this question because many times at the collegiate level there is not as close of

a relationship between the teachers and their students. I found it interesting that several of the participants had familial support, but they still would turn to their teachers for the help they needed. While familial support is very important, it again causes me to question the support systems these students rely on as when they go on to college or into the workforce these support systems are not always able to be there for them in the same context as they were when the student was still in high school.

Future Concerns - Consequences of Underdeveloped Literacy Skills

From my reflections on the analysis it leads me to questioning what this will mean for our current students, especially if they do not acquire the skill level needed for these jobs of the future. Without the ability to write well the opportunities that our adolescents will have in regards to education and future employment will be greatly limited (Graham, Harris & Loynachan, 1993; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2004).

With under-developed literacy skills there will be consequences that will affect our adolescents academically, socially, emotionally and economically, as well as not being able to meet the demands of higher education or the work place (Anonymous, 2008; Hock, et al., 2009). It is clear that they need powerful literacy, as Finn (2009) stated is the kind of literacy skills that will get them into the better four year colleges (p. 127). Getting our students to the level to further their education is important.

We live in a digital culture where our youth currently are able to manipulate information from cell phones through tweets, texts, and even the internet, which is where they tend to get most of the information they use in their schoolwork. According to Breivik (2005), regardless of these ways they interact with technology it is not translating into better educated and informed college graduates or more competent and efficient workers (p. 22). So

what do we need to do to better prepare them for their future? We need to prepare our students for their future by teaching them problem solving, collaboration, analysis, technology skills (Kist, 2005; National Council of Teachers of English, 2007; Wagner, 2000) as well as teaching them critical thinking skills to become information literate, which are considered essential for the 21st century (Azzam, 2009; Breivik, 2005; Roberts & Billings, 2008). Many of us assume that it is proficiency in information technologies that will be most important to these adolescents in their future, but it is written and oral communication skills, collaboration, work ethic, critical thinking skills, and leadership that future employers values more (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007, p. 2).

College and Career Readiness

One concern as an educator is whether these participants and their fellow classmates will be ready for the next step, whether it is college or the work place. In particular, are they truly ready for college, especially since they have struggled with their literacy in high school? Will they have the level of skills needed to be successful once they are no longer in high school? In the interview with Jane she specifically stated that she wished that she was more prepared for college, which shows that she did not feel that she had been taught everything she needed to feel confident in herself. As reported by Pittman (2010) only three in ten seniors are college-ready and only four in ten high school graduates are work-ready (p. 13). This illustrates why many students that graduate from high school are not fully prepared for the college-level literacy skills, which requires them to take remedial courses in reading and writing (Aud et al., 2011; Snow and Moje, 2010). This led me to question the rates that students are having to take remedial courses in college. The numbers vary based on the source. Santa, 2006, reports that “53% of high school graduates enroll in remedial courses in

postsecondary schools” (p. 486), while Aud et al. (2011) report that at two year institutions 42% of first year undergraduates enroll in remedial courses, but that at four year institutions, depending on the type, the amount ranged from 22-39% (p. 70). This makes me ask then what will it take to get these students to the level needed so they do not have to take remedial courses? Pittman (2010) also pointed out that up to one-fourth of all college freshman do not return for their second year in college (p. 13). I also question whether these students in this study will be required to take remedial courses and whether they will finish college. There are still many unanswered questions that can only be explored by making changes and doing further research.

Recommendations

After completing this study it is obvious that changes need to be made in our current educational system if we truly want to help these students to read at the literacy levels necessary for them to find success in this ever changing world. There is no single answer or crystal ball that will guide us to the perfect solution to the changes needed to ensure that our students are ready for college and career after high school. In this section the focus will be on various possible changes that can affect the outcomes of our students and their future opportunities.

Systemic Change

Systemic changes need to be explored as possibilities for addressing the literacy needs of the students for the 21st century. Such changes might include changes in structure, the integration of technology, changes in the curriculum and even changes in attitudes, which will be discussed as they apply to each of the previously mentioned changes. All of these systemic changes will affect the achievement levels of our students and their preparedness

for their futures. So how do we reform our educational system? How do we get all teachers to be on board and to be supportive? Many of the questions do not have answers. We know that we cannot change our educational system overnight and that before we make drastic changes that further research would need to be done.

Structural changes. Changes in structure can include adjusting the daily schedule to impact how teachers teach. As previously mentioned in the literature review, many of our high schools are set up on hourly schedules and they are very segmented by content. One possible structural change could be block scheduling. Because of time constraints in traditional 50 minute class periods the ability of teachers to implement cooperative learning and innovative instructional methods is a concern (Slate & Jones, 2000, p. 55). With block scheduling the school day is divided into fewer, but longer, class periods, which has been recommended as a means of providing more time for instructional methods and cooperative learning (Canady & Rettig, 1995; Carroll, 1994; Rettig & Canady, 1998; Slate & Jones, 2000). The concept of block scheduling is a controversial educational reform, however, advocates argue that block scheduling increases engagement, grade point averages, graduation rates, and reduces absenteeism (Arhar, 1992; Benton-Kupper, 1999; Canady & Rettig, 1995; Khazzaka, 1997; Reid, Hierck, & Veregin, 1994; Slate & Jones, 2000; Vars, 1993). Other benefits that students perceived, according to Slate and Jones (2000), included additional time to study and to prepare for class, they felt they also received more individual attention than they did in traditional class periods (pp. 58-59).

Another possible structural change is in the classroom and it specifically relates to how teachers teach. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) it is suggested that we need to take an integrated approach to effectively instruct in 21st century

literacies, which means helping students to be able to access, evaluate, synthesize, and contribute information (p. 5). Reading, writing, speaking and listening are interconnected skills that develop conjunctively and Roberts and Billings (2008) state these skills are the key to teaching thinking (p. 36), which is one of the skills needed for the 21st century if they want to successfully compete in the complex and diverse world. In order to meet more rigorous expectations, which is the focus of new college and career ready standards, teachers will have to teach in ways that are distinctly different than current practices (Austin, 2006; Carter, 2001; Coggshall, 2012). In order to achieve this change in classroom teaching practices it will not only take time, but training and support will be required (Carter, 2001; Duran, Yaussy, & Yaussy, 2011; Oliver & Corn, 2008).

An integrated approach aimed at improving adolescent literacy forces us to move beyond individual teachers and isolated programs (Ivey & Fisher, 2006, p. 107), which is the structure of many high schools. When asking teachers to embed literacy into the content they are teaching one possible reason for resistance is that historically this approach has put the emphasis on literacy instead of on the content (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Moje, 2008). As previously discussed in the literature review many teachers feel that it is the responsibility of the English Language Arts teachers to teach literacy (Anonymous, 2008; Clarke, 2006; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008) and due to pressures they have to focus on their content as they have large amounts to cover in limited time frames (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Boyer, 1983; Dole, 2003; Fullan, 1991; Little, 1993; McLaughlin, Talbert & Bascia, 1990; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). Ivey and Fisher (2006) included a student's perspective on improving adolescent literacy. They selected a student who had faced significant challenges within the school system to share his thoughts on how adolescent literacy achievement could

be improved at the high school level. In the student's response one section directly related to literacy beyond the core classes as he stated:

I support the ideas of incorporating literacy into other areas. Students have to know how to read the information books. Students need to be able to read different books and have a lot of things to read. Students in today's world also need to understand the arts and sciences, as this is what describes the world. I think that students should have to explore the arts and sciences as a requirement to graduate. Further on the arts and sciences part, I would suggest isolating large blocks of time within the courses, for large hands-on projects that cover multiple subject areas. (Ivey & Fisher, 2006, p. 112)

This student's statement directly related to literacy across all content areas and if we truly want adolescents to learn from the texts used in all content areas then every content teacher has a role to play (Ivey & Fisher, 2006, p. 22). If an integrated approach is to be incorporated then not only must all teachers be committed, but the school has to make a commitment to the teachers, which means that professional development needs to be provided as well as time to implement changes (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Duran, Yaussy, & Yaussy, 2011; Ivey & Fisher, 2006). There are other changes, besides structural changes, that need to occur for true change to take effect in our schools.

Integration of technology. One suggestion for change would be to create more virtual classrooms or instruction that is more technology driven. For this change to be implemented there are many factors that would need to be addressed, which include money that would be needed to acquire the equipment, training for the teachers to be able to implement their curriculum in a totally different, and often foreign, format, and complete revisions of curriculums since most of them are not designed to be taught in the manner being suggested. The suggestion for more integration of technology comes about due to the fact that many jobs today are totally technologically driven and many are virtual since the

person can be anywhere in the world and many classes are now being taken and taught on-line with no face-to-face time. Even our youth are considered a digital generation who is comfortable with technology use, including the internet, computers, mobile technologies, and the technology is a necessary part of their lives (Donovan, Green, & Hartley, 2010, p. 424). Resier and Butzin (1998) state that today's students are eager to become technologically literate since they easily relate to electronic media in their fast-paced world outside the classroom (pp. 39-40).

One format of integrating technology that seems to be becoming a popular idea is one-to-one computing, which means one computer to one student (Carter, 2001; Jones, 2007).

Carter (2001) states:

In an age when everyone, from parents to community groups to legislators, is calling for increased accountability in education . . . laptop programs are being viewed as one workable strategy to address such problems as low achievement, poor attendance, and equal access to technology. (p. 39)

It is suggested by Carter (2001) that one-to-one computing will revolutionize the way teachers teach and students learn, which could be a desirable and possibly essential outcome for the digital age (p. 39). It is common knowledge that parents use computers at work, modems, databases, spreadsheets, and graphing programs and it is their expectation that their children be prepared for the technological world that they will be entering after high school (Matray & Proulx, 1995; Snelling, 1993). It is also the belief of districts and communities that if students are to be successful in the 21st century, both in the job market and at college, then they must be able to use technology effectively and efficiently (Cox & Hanson, 2009; Matray & Proulx, 1995). Smith and Smith (2010) state "Proficiency with technology is a

form of literacy” (p. 408), which is why literacy can and does need to be taught even if the structure of the classroom is changing to integrate more technology.

Technology is expensive and will not guarantee improved student learning (Howe, 1998, p. 32). There is still a digital divide, which is a concern, and is when the gap is between those having access to computer technology and those who do not, which even pertains to households having computer access compared to those who do not (Attewell, 2001; Dickard & Schneider, 2002; Larrison, Nackerud, Risler, & Sullivan, 2002; Norris, 2001, Salpeter, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2010). There are three main options for acquiring the equipment which include outright purchasing, leasing and lease/purchasing, but a combination of funding sources may also be used (Carter, 2001, p. 44). If the integration of technology, which is a great expenditure, does not produce improved student learning there could be an adverse reaction from administrators, parents, and taxpayers (Howe, 1998, p. 32).

To begin you have to have a vision. Everyone must also accept that the integration of technology, especially in a one-to-one computing situation, will require time, money, training, and support (Carter, 2001; Cox & Hanson, 2009; Derry, 2008). Cox and Hanson (2009) suggests that from planning to implementation of one-to-one computing the timeline should span three years (p. 54). The planning is not just the decision of which equipment and software to purchase, but the construction of acceptable use policies for all users, curriculum expectations, and time for training and curriculum development (Cox and Hanson, 2009, pp. 54-55). With the integration of technology teachers should expect to teach differently, which does mean that attitudes will have to change in order to accept the changes needed to make the one-to-one computing a success. “This is a paradigm shift, and it’s going to be difficult for some teachers” (Carter, 2001, p. 48).

It is important to keep in mind that the integration of the computer into the classroom does not replace the teacher (Matray & Proulx, 1995; Proctor, Dalton & Grisham, 2007). The digital environment is intended to create opportunities for students to gain information in ways that can meet their individual needs, but it is the offline teacher-student interactions that will supplement their learning (Proctor, Dalton, & Grisham, 2007, p. 73). Bauer (2005) states that almost any informational or educational content can be transmitted by the Internet, but he does state the exception is when hands-on training is needed (p. 54). The computer is intended to allow the student to become a more active participant in their learning, more self-directed, and the teacher then becomes more of a guide, facilitator, or resource person (Donovan, Gren, & Hartley, 2010; Matray & Proulx, 1995; Reiser & Buzin, 1998). This demonstrates the need for students to become independent in their learning and not rely solely on the teacher, which the independent learning is one of the life-long skills mentioned as a 21st century skill (Bawden, 2001; Buschman, 2009; Herrington, 1998; Howe, 1998; Marcum, 2002; McCrank, 1992; Warlick, 1994).

When looking at the use of technology by youth today it is common knowledge that they use technology often, but they do not necessarily use it ethically, or their personal ethics may not reflect the district's policies (Cox & Hanson, 2009; Derry, 2008; Howe, 1998). This makes it important that instruction be given on ethical use, since the ease of downloading and copying information, while teaching students responsibility to follow academic honesty and copyright laws (Howe, 1998, p. 33).

There are benefits to the integration of technology, which include more time out of class time is spent on school work when the computer is able to be taken home by the student (Carter, 2001, p. 39), improved self-image (Carter, 2001; Reiser & Butzin, 1998), and

increased motivation (Barron, Harmes & Kemker, 2006; Carter, 2001; Donovan, Green & Hartley, 2010; McHale, 2007; Mouza, 2008). It is often thought that by bringing in technology that the teaching will be better and there will be increased student motivation (Donovan, Green, & Hartley, 2010; Richardson & Placier, 2001). However, it is important to keep in mind that while students may appear to be actively engaged, they in fact may be off task. According to Donovan, Green and Hartley (2010) off-task behavior is less researched and less documented, possible because the range of off-task behaviors is extensive (p. 426). Bangert-Drowns and Pyke (2001) state, “engaged students comply with minimal requirements for accomplishing school assignments, and disengaged students are off-task” (p. 216). Behaviors that can represent off-task behaviors include involvement in a task not related to the assignment, discussing irrelevant topics, not completing any tasks assigned, using the technology for other purposes such as surfing the Internet, e-mailing, or playing games (Donovan, Green, & Hartley, 2010, p. 426). Students being off-task is not a new phenomena, but it will continue to be an issue that teachers have to address in order to have an effective teaching and learning environment.

There is a wealth of research over the last 20 years that supports the teaching of reading comprehension strategies (Proctor, Dalton, & Grisham, 2007; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). According to Smith and Smith (2010) the use of a computer is notably related with higher literacy proficiencies (p. 421). While our lives are deeply embedded in the use of technological tools, continued exposure to text is more likely to result in higher literacy levels (Proctor, Dalton, Grisham, p. 75), however, they go on to point out the value of digital literacy environments point out the need for continued research in improving literacy outcomes for all students (p. 90).

The integration of technology is a powerful tool that can be very beneficial in teaching literacy and the skills needed for the futures of our students. It does make me wonder how much time should be devoted to all digital learning and to what extent should students still be learning from paper and pencil methods. In regards to virtual classrooms I question if students being taught virtually, without the face-to-face instruction nor with the teacher student relationships that are built in face-to-face settings, which students so heavily depend on, would those that struggle in our current system thrive or would they struggle even more? Again, no perfect solutions and no definite answers, but again more research would be needed to determine what would be best for the education of our students.

Curricular changes. Curricular changes are definitely needed with the integration of technology as it is important that the changes make clear connections from the software to the curriculum to achieve the academic standards (Cox & Hanson, 2009, p. 54). While it is easy to see how the curriculum cannot be substituted solely by the implementation of the technology there are also other curricular changes that are on the horizon for many schools. There is a change in curricular focus as with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2002 the emphasis was on standards-based education, which for high schools has been redefined as making sure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and careers (Sambolt & Blumenthal, 2013, p. 1). The shift towards standards based education is because recent projections suggest that by 2018, 63 % of all jobs in the United States will require some postsecondary training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Sambolt & Blumenthal, 2013).

The changes for college and career ready standards will result in new curricula, new assessments and there will be a need for extensive professional development to create

effective educator systems (Killion, 2012, p. 3). These changes are more commonly known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) defined by Sambolt and Blumenthal (2013) as:

The Common Core State Standards are evidence-based and derived from internationally competitive benchmarks in academic achievement. The aim of the Common Core State Standards is to provide fewer standards with explicit and attainable goals for all students and to establish grade- or course-specific expectations that students must master to be college and career ready in ELA [English Language Arts] and mathematics. (p. 6)

Sambolt and Blumenthal (2013) state the “CCSS not only provide ELA and mathematics academic standards, but they also integrate higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and research and synthesis skills” (p. 6). The CCSS are intended to provide a rigorous, more personalized education for every student, along with new assessments (Killion, 2012, p. 4). Another purpose of the CCSS is to include strategies and approaches for building content literacy (Israel, Maynard, & Williamson, 2013, p. 20).

With the task of redesigning curriculum and to provide training for teachers on how to implement the CCSS it is acknowledged that the professional development that teachers have previously been provided will not be enough, but there will have to be a shift to professional learning that provides a deeper understanding that results in changes in teacher practices and student achievement (Killion, 2012, p. 7). With the implementation of the CCSS there will be changes, not only for the teachers, but also for the students as they will encounter different kinds of learning experiences and environments (Killion, 2012, p. 10). While making changes to imbed the CCSS into the curriculum making changes with the integration of technology can be done at the same time, but will require a great amount of training, and work from all staff at the school. As a whole the argument for the CCSS is that these skills cannot be taught without content and they have to be developed through practice

not just exposure (Pittman, 2010, p. 14). It also needs to be acknowledged that schools cannot do this alone, nor will it be done overnight. There is still a need to look deeper at all of the aspects of education that affect adolescent literacy and their preparedness for the 21st century. In the next section possibilities for future research will be addressed.

Suggestions for Future Research

Research Focused on Adolescent Literacy

One area that needs to have further research is adolescent literacy, but specifically at the high school level. When looking at the research it was acknowledged that students in grades 4-12 present a distinctly different set of needs than those of beginning readers, but the resources typically go to the primary grades (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Kamil, 2003; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). It has also been noted that research that has been published tends to address the beginning or elementary level literacy rather than the secondary level (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Kantor, Miller & Fernie, 1992; McCarthy, 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1992; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). When funding is allocated for children's literacy or to programs for adult literacy remediation, our adolescents and their literacy are ignored (Moje, 2002; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; Vacca, 1998). Why is there a lack of attention to our youth and their literacy needs? According to Moje (2002) this causes one to assume that among theorists and policy makers "that nothing occurs in the literacy development of youth, that no learning about literacy occurs as youth make use of literacy tools to navigate, resist, construct, and reconstruct popular, academic, and work cultures" (p. 211). It is distressing to see the lack of attention given to adolescents literacy needs. If as Moje (2002) suggests that more funds were allocated and more studies conducted on youth literacies we might understand how they learn

increasingly complex literacy practices, how they reinvent literacies for unique contexts, and how they use literacy to navigate technologies and social worlds (p. 212).

An interesting suggestion for future studies of adolescents' literacy by Moje (2002) suggests that the practices of youth's literacy be examined to see how they reflect the exchange of multiple groups and how the knowledge, ways of knowing, and identities they build from these group experiences come together with the deep content learning that is expected of them in secondary classrooms by teachers, parents and administrators (p. 213). Are their literacy levels outside of school at the same level as they demonstrate in school? I question that because adolescents are very social and they are using literacy outside of school, but often seem unmotivated when in school which could be due to a lack of interest in the topic being studied. However, as Wise (2009) states "No student with low literacy skills can graduate from high school prepared for college or a career" (p. 369), so it is our duty to do further research to get a true picture of the literacy levels of adolescents and their needs to help them find the success they need to be a functioning literate citizen in our global world.

Longitudinal Studies

In looking at the time frame of this study it is clear to me that if one could conduct a longitudinal study that would follow a group of students through their high school years and then through the next four to six years this would allow for a greater understanding of the successes or failures these struggling adolescent readers might face. According to Maxwell (2005) an intensive, long-term involvement with participant observations provides more complete data about specific situations and events (p. 110). Maxwell (2005) goes on to state "Not only does it provide more, and more different kinds, of data, but also the data are more

direct and less dependent on inference” (p. 110). Becker (1970) stated “Both long-term involvement and intensive interviews enable you to collect ‘rich’ data, data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on” (pp. 51-62). Further research of a group long-term, such as the one I studied, would allow the researcher to see if they were required to take remedial courses if they went on to college, it would show whether they successfully completed post-secondary education with the attainment of a degree and finally it would allow the researcher to see if they were able to successfully compete and enter the global market.

If I were to lengthen the study I would also suggest including observations of the participants throughout the study so that over time a clearer picture can be gathered of the participants true experiences with literacy. During an extended study I would also suggest multiple interviews at various points throughout the study. Because this study was focused only on the period of time the participants were in high school it does not truly help to determine whether they are truly prepared for the 21st century. While they did show success in high school through several factors it does not give a clear picture of whether they will find the same successes after high school.

Mixed Methods Designed Study

A second area that needs further research is curricular changes, which might benefit from being conducted as a mixed methods designed study. According to Patton (2002), “a study may employ more than one sampling strategy. It may also include multiple types of data” (p. 247). Patton goes on to state, “this can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 247). The curricular changes need to demonstrate pedagogically sound instruction that meets the needs of our

students in a global society, not to just introduce more technology. Walker (1999) acknowledged that the use of information technology would raise the educational expectations (p. 18), but in order to raise the bar what does this mean for educators? With the Common Core State Standards the current standards used in most schools are not considered to be high enough, or rigorous enough. I have a concern, which Walker also mentioned, in that students who are struggling to meet today's expectations may face an even tougher time if the bar is raised.

Without fully knowing what specific skills will be needed for the jobs of the future this makes it very difficult for teachers to change their curriculum to fit the needs of the future, however, we do know that the new technologies shape literacies and present opportunities for teachers to foster more reading and writing in their classes (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007, p. 2). For some teachers this will be difficult, whether they are resistant to change or they lack the skills needed to make these changes. This is why curriculums need to be researched and designed, but then the next step would be to provide the necessary training to the teachers to be able to fully implement the content; since "There is nothing worse than a teacher having to take a product and deploy it to a bunch of digital-native students and have them know more than the teacher" (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 34). This is why a study that looks at the current curriculum, what changes need to be made to meet the Common Core State Standards, and what skills need to be incorporated to make sure our students are ready for the technologically changing world would be recommended. Another extension for this could be to look at how technology needs to be integrated when writing the curriculum to make sure that the students are being taught in the way that many of them will work, both at college and in careers, after high school. This would open up another avenue

for researching the trend of high schools going to one-to-one computing and whether the students participating in the program are more prepared compared to students from schools that do not have the one-to-one computing, because not only would the use of the technology be able to be a part of the study, but the curriculums for the different settings would definitely be different since one would be integrating more technology into their daily lessons.

Research Support Systems Students Rely On

As determined through this study students rely heavily on their teachers for their success. This leads to the need to examine the support systems at both the post-secondary environment, both college and employment. The transition from high school to university can be very stressful for many individuals due to facing a variety of stressors, including making new relationships, learning study habits for a new environment, and functioning as an independent adult (Parker, Hogan, Eastabrook, Oke, & Wood, 2006, p. 1330). What supports will be available for students after high school? It is common that in college the classes are often larger and lack the same sense of community, or connection, that one has with their teachers in high school. Chickering and Gamson (1987) state “An undergraduate education should prepare students to understand and deal intelligently with modern life” (p.3). They also state that contact between students and faculty will help students to get through the rough times and to be able to think about their futures. However, as mentioned by Parker, et al. (2006) “the majority of high school students who go to university or college will withdraw from that institution before graduation” (p. 1330). This clearly demonstrates a need for researching the support systems that students need after high school to help them find success both in post-secondary schooling and the work place.

Research Effectiveness of Block Scheduling

A study that compares a traditional schedule to a block schedule, specifically in regards to the impact on literacy learning, is needed to determine the effectiveness of block scheduling. Block scheduling is reputed as a means of providing more time for instructional methods and cooperative learning (Canady & Rettig, 1995; Carroll, 1994; Rettig & Canady, 1998; Slate & Jones, 2000), while claiming that block scheduling has positive impacts on student engagement, grade point averages, graduation rates, and reduction of absenteeism (Arhar, 1992; Benton-Kupper, 1999; Canady & Rettig, 1995; Khazzaka, 1997; Reid, Hierck, & Veregin, 1994; Slate & Jones, 2000; Vars, 1993). Extra time focused on literacy is beneficial to older struggling readers, but in a typical day with 50 minute periods there is a lack of time, which is a component needing to be addressed in regards to struggling readers becoming better readers due to being able to spend a greater amount of time with an expert teacher (Fisher & Ivey, 2006; McCormick, 1994; Morris, Ervin, & Conrad, 1996). Research is needed to specifically look at both settings and the instructional practices that are utilized, possibly due to time constraints, to gain a deeper understanding of whether the amount of time spent in a class period affects the literacy learning of students.

Research Integrating Literacy Instruction Across-the-Curriculum

The idea of incorporating literacy instruction into all content areas across-the-curriculum is one that many secondary teachers balk at due to feelings of inadequacy in their training on how to teach literacy (Allen, 2000; Alvermann, 2004; Cziko, 1998; Neuman & Rao, 2004; Wren & Reed, 2005). Other factors that affect the willingness of teachers to devote time to literacy instruction include a lack of time (Neuman & Rao, 2004; Wren & Reed, 2005) high stakes testing pressures (Greenleaf Hinchman, 2009; Santa, 2006), and the

fact that many feel it is not their responsibility to teach literacy (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Neuman & Rao, 2004). In order to address the literacy needs of struggling students the responsibility needs to be shared by everyone in the school (Hand, 2006; National Institute for Literacy, 2007). This leads to the need for research to be conducted that determines the level of literacy instruction across-the-curriculum in secondary schools and how effective that instruction is. Another aspect that contributes to the integration of literacy instruction is the preparedness of teachers, which can be determined by studying the amount and quality of professional development that is provided to prepare teachers to be able to successfully address the literacy needs of the students as they implement literacy instruction into all content areas.

Examine Impact of Technology

With the integration of technology in schools it is important to examine the impact of the technology on management and structural issues, professional development for teachers, and the visions for the use of technology in supporting literacy learning. With the increased technological demands for success in the 21st century many districts and communities believe that technology needs to be able to be used effectively and efficiently (Cox & Hanson, 2009; Matray & Proulx, 1995). First, a collective vision of all stakeholders is needed so everyone is working towards the same goal. The integration of technology is intended to help students become more active participants in their own learning and that they become more self-directed (Donovan, Gren, & Hartley, 2010; Matray & Proulx, 1995; Reiser & Buzin, 1998), which aligns with the 21st century skill of students becoming more independent learners with less reliance on their teachers (Bawden, 2001; Buschman, 2009; Herrington, 1998; Howe, 1998; Marcum, 2002; McCrank, 1992; Warlick, 2004). This vision and approach will also

require a mind shift in how classes are taught and will require professional development that allows teachers to learn how to teach in a more technologically integrated approach and that will provide support and training in aligning the curriculum with the technology to make sure that content is still being covered. In regards to management and structural issues the physical setting may require changes that will allow the increased integration of technology, but the issue of management will still require teachers to seek ways to keep the students on task and motivated. Off task behaviors in a classroom are not a new issue with the introduction of increased technology, but the technology can become a distraction as it will provide a means for students to be off task by using the technology for other purposes (Donovan, Green, & Hartley, 2010).

With the integration of more technology within our schools this leads to the need for research to determine if it is effective in instruction and what impact it has on the educational outcomes of students. Also of interest would be whether one-to-one computing makes a difference in the achievement levels of the students. This could also be furthered studied in regards to how many devices students use on a daily basis for educational purposes and how many do or do not have access outside of school hours and the impact this accessibility has to their achievement levels. It would also be of interest to determine the impact of the technology, specifically on literacy learning and whether the literacy achievement levels are affected.

Examine Unique Needs of English Language Learners and Literacy at the Secondary Level

The issue of the literacy learning needs of English language learners at the secondary level brings to light another area for research. As this study demonstrated, George was able

to be successful in high school even though he struggled to acquire the English language skills needed to demonstrate proficiency. This brought up questions of the needs that may be unique to students that are English language learners and how those needs affect the acquisition of literacy skills and how this affects their academic achievement levels. Brock (2007) states that American schools often fail to provide the quality educational opportunities, especially for those from culturally diverse backgrounds, as can be seen through lower standardized test scores, higher rates for high school dropouts for students from diverse backgrounds, and an overrepresentation of students from diverse backgrounds in remedial programs in our schools (p. 472). As a teacher, Brock stated that she was ill-prepared to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which may also be the case for many educators who are not trained in how to teach English language learners. This is supported as stated by Shatz and Wilkinson (2010) that educators are often unschooled regarding the varied cultures and languages that our nation's students are now comprised of and how educators often have to deal with the demands of the standards and often ignore the problems the dual-language learners face (p. xi). They also state "such children often have English language skills that are insufficient for attaining educational goals" (p. 2). For educators to be able to meet the needs of these students research that identifies the unique needs of these English language learners, specifically their literacy needs, is essential; especially for the older students at the secondary level since they face different challenges than younger learners might. Another factor that can affect the learning of English language learners includes cultural backgrounds, as this affects how students interact in class (Shatz & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 155). Therefore research also needs to be able to identify how the students can best learn at the secondary level.

Final Thoughts

As I concluded my study I found myself reflecting on how this study could be improved and I also find myself with more questions not answered. Through the research I have gained new insights into ways to address the literacy needs of my students. The integration of technology has been very interesting to research, as the school I am teaching in is going to implement one-to-one computing next year. Even though I teach in a computer lab, where the technology is integrated into my lessons, I am curious if the literacy skills of the students will improve with the integration of the computers building wide. I currently work on having students read while performing tasks on the computer, and I see students who struggle to read relying on the teacher or a student next to them to help them with the task so they do not have to read the information. Even though I see students struggling I continue to incorporate reading activities as I hope that as they are able to successfully complete a task they will find confidence to willingly approach the next reading assignment with more confidence.

When I first came to the district in which I currently teach, all teachers were expected to embed literacy instruction into their lessons. I realized that I did use literacy, but that it was not as focused on the literacy experiences that had a deeper purpose or relevancy towards improving the skills of my students. It was because of the building goals for literacy that I became interested in learning more about ways to help students improve their literacy skills, regardless of which content area was being taught. It has also helped me to realize that we must all empower our students to become more literate, which will allow them to participate more fully in society and the workplace. Gee (2000) states, “discourses give one access to power, social goods, and relative freedom from oppression in our new capitalist,

global, high-tech world, for poor and rich alike” (p. 413). To find power and success in their futures is what we should wish for all of our students.

APPENDIX A
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
NARRATIVE CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Narrative Consent Form

Request to Participate

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted at a Midwestern High School.

Investigator

This study will be conducted by Julie Miller, a student in the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations (ELPF).

Who will Participate

Only students that are in the class of 2012 who are age 18 or older will be invited to participate. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to write about your literacy experiences throughout your high school years and how you feel these experiences have affected your success. The length of your story can only be determined by you, as this is your story.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the perspectives of students and their literacy experiences and success during their high school years. Literacy is not just the ability to read, write and speak a language, in your high school literacy is defined listening, viewing, thinking, speaking, reading, and writing. It is from your experiences that we hope to improve the literacy experiences within the classrooms. I would like to know what has gone well for you and what can be improved upon based upon the learning experiences that you have had during high school. Your story about how your high school served you as a learner is important to this study.

Methods/Procedures

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in this study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to write about your high school experiences with literacy, as defined above. As you write your story you are encouraged to share any experience in your learning experiences and how you think they went.

The findings may be used in professional presentations or be published in professional journals; however, your identity will be protected, and all information will be stored in a locked and secure location in the office of the principal investigator..

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in this study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. Participating or not participating will not affect your grades. If you choose to stop participating your story will still be used within this study, but all identities will be kept anonymous.

Fees and Expenses

You are not responsible for any costs or expenses associated with this study

Compensation

No compensation will be given to the participant for their participation in this study.

Risks and Inconveniences

There are no known risks for participating in this study. However, there may be a loss of confidentiality, which will be minimized by removing all identifiers from data, documents and no real names will be used in the report. Also all documents, data, and interviews will be stored in a locked and secured location in the office of the principal investigator. You may refuse to complete the measures or refuse to answer any questions, and/or discontinue your participation at any time.

Benefits

Although there are no foreseeable direct benefits to you it is hoped that the research will benefit others or society in general. When I am finished I will use the information to write a report about what I have found out.

Confidentiality

All of the information you complete and share in this study will be kept confidential.

While every effort will be made to keep confidential all of the information you complete and share, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study for quality improvement and regulatory functions. Your identity will not be provided on the measures, tapes, or their transcriptions. Also, all of the measures, tapes, and their transcriptions will be kept in a locked office. The information obtained in this study may be presented at professional conferences or published in journals; however you will not be identified in any way.

Questions

You should contact the Office of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions about the study that you are participating in you

are encouraged to call Julie Miller, the investigator, at (816) 736-5340 ext. 2897 or e-mail me at jammt9@mail.umkc.edu.

Authorization

By signing your name below, you are indicating that (1) you have read this form, form or it has been read to you, (2) you agree to take part in this study, (3) you have received a copy of this consent form, and (4) you agree to have the information you share in the study be used for the stated research purposes.

Printed Name of the Participant _____

Signature of the Participant _____

Date _____

Printed Name of the Investigator _____

Signature of the Investigator _____

APPENDIX B
WRITING PROMPT

Writing Prompt

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study that focuses on Literacy experiences of high school students. This study is intended to focus on your personal experiences with literacy and your learning that you have experienced during your high school years.

Directions:

Please begin your story using the prompt in italics below to aid you in reflecting on your experiences throughout high school where you encountered difficulties with literacy. What do you think has helped you to find success in school specifically in terms of your literacy experiences? Paper will be provided to you. Your story will be assessed for content in regards to your perceptions and in no way will it be critiqued on your writing skills or for use in any of your classes. The information from your story will be regarding your literacy experiences in a secondary level learning environment.

Literacy is not just the ability to read, write and speak a language, but it is also defined as listening, viewing, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, and expressing oneself. Describe your experiences with literacy both in high school classes and outside of school. Include any specific memories, whether positive or negative, when you encountered difficulties with literacy. Also include specific situations or memories when you encountered success with literacy. Please tell your story in your own words.

APPENDIX C
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Interview Consent Form

Request to Participate

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted at a Midwestern High School.

Investigator

This study will be conducted by Julie Miller, a student in the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations (ELPF).

Who will Participate

Only students that are in the class of 2012 who are age 18 or older will be invited to participate. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your literacy experiences throughout your high school years and how you feel these experiences have affected your success. The length of the interview will be approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the perspectives of students and their literacy experiences and success during their high school years. Literacy is not just the ability to read, write and speak a language, in your high school literacy is defined listening, viewing, thinking, speaking, reading, and writing. It is from your experiences that we hope to improve the literacy experiences within the classrooms. I would like to know what has gone well for you and what can be improved upon based upon the learning experiences that you have had during high school. Your story about how your high school served you as a learner is important to this study.

Methods/Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your high school experiences with literacy, as defined above.

The findings may be used in professional presentations or be published in professional journals; however, your identity will be protected and all information will be stored in a locked and secure location in the office of the principal investigator.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in this study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. It is okay to not participate or to stop participating at any time. Participating or not participating will not affect your grades. If you choose to stop participating your story will still be used within this study, but all identities will be kept anonymous.

Fees and Expenses

You are not responsible for any costs or expenses associated with this study

Compensation

No compensation will be given to the participant for their participation in this study.

Risks and Inconveniences

There are no known risks for participating in this study. However, there may be a loss of confidentiality, which will be minimized by removing all identifiers from data, documents and no real names will be used in the report. Also all documents, data, and interviews will be stored in a locked and secured location in the office of the principal investigator. You may refuse to complete the measures or refuse to answer any questions, and/or discontinue your participation at any time.

Benefits

Although there are no foreseeable direct benefits to you it is hoped that the research will benefit others or society in general. When I am finished I will use the information to write a report about what I have found out.

Confidentiality

All of the information you complete and share in this study will be kept confidential.

While every effort will be made to keep confidential all of the information you complete and share, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study for quality improvement and regulatory functions. Your identity will not be provided on the measures, tapes, or their transcriptions. Also, all of the measures, tapes, and their transcriptions will be kept in a locked office. The information obtained in this study may be presented at professional conferences or published in journals; however you will not be identified in any way.

Questions

You should contact the Office of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions about the study that you are participating in you are encouraged to call Julie Miller, the investigator, at (816) 736-5340 ext. 2897 or e-mail me at jammt9@mail.umkc.edu.

Authorization

By signing your name below, you are indicating that (1) you have read this form or it has been read to you, (2) you agree to take part in this study, (3) you have received a copy of this consent form, and (4) you agree to have the information you share in the study be used for the stated research purposes.

Printed Name of the Participant _____

Signature of the Participant _____

Date _____

Printed Name of the Investigator _____

Signature of the Investigator _____

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview for this study. You will be asked a series of questions in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of your literacy experiences both in high school classes and outside of school. I may refer to information you shared in your story about your literacy experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding and/or to clarify your experiences. During this interview I will be recording our dialogue and making notes so that your experiences will be captured in your own words.

At times I may ask you to expand your answer so that clarity and a deeper understanding may be gained. I will use a list of questions to guide our dialogue. It is my goal to capture your personal experiences with literacy both in high school classes and outside of school as accurately as possible. For the purposes of this discussion we are going to consider literacy to not just be reading and writing, but to also include listening, viewing, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, and expressing oneself.

1. What is being in school like for you? What classes are you taking this semester? Do you find any particular class easy or difficult? Do you have any class that you particularly like or dislike?
2. In regards to your success with literacy what do you think was one of the biggest impacts that your teachers did – in terms of strategies – that you feel helped you the most? (If the student does not understand what I am asking I will use this opportunity to clarify literacy and literacy strategies.)
 - a. Can you describe some of the literacy strategies your teacher(s) have used?
 - b. What strategies have helped the most?
 - c. Was there a specific teacher and/or class that you feel you received the most help with your literacy?
 - d. What areas of literacy do you feel you have the most difficulty with?
 - e. What areas of literacy do you feel you have the most success with?
3. How would you describe your personal experiences with literacy in the high school classes you have been enrolled in?
 - a. Do you think literacy is important in school, in what ways?
 - b. Do you see any benefits that you can identify from these classroom experiences?
 - c. Can you give specific experiences that you feel did not help you with your literacy in the classes you were in?
 - d. Where do you use literacy in school- specifically any setting (i.e.: classes, library, interactions with others, etc.)?
 - e. Can you describe your literacy abilities now compared to when you were a sophomore?

4. What strategies or situations outside of school have influenced or affected your experiences with literacy?
 - a. Where do you use literacy outside of school?
 - b. How do you apply literacy strategies outside of school?

5. What recommendations would you give to high school teachers they could use to help their students improve their literacy?

6. What can students pursue outside of school to help with their literacy if they have difficulties and/or struggle with literacy?

Other questions to help the student expound on specific answers:

1. Can you tell me some more about that?
2. What do you mean when you say _____?
3. I see. What do you mean by _____?
4. Yes. Go on.
5. Hmm. What else can you say about _____?
6. That's good. I'm not sure I understand when you say _____. Can you explain more fully?
7. Let's talk about that in more detail.
8. I'm trying to find out what you think about _____. Tell me more.
9. It's not clear to me. Can you give an example of what you mean when you say _____?
10. That sounds interesting. Keep telling me about it.

APPENDIX E
IN-DEPTH CODING ANALYSIS PER PARTICIPANT

In-depth Coding Analysis per participant

Theme	Interpretive Code	Descriptive Code	Sally	Mary	George	Lucy	Jane
Self-Efficacy	Socialization	Peer Relations	x		x		
		Aspirations/Goals			x		x
	Self-Image	Self-Confidence	x	x	x	x	x
		Self-Advocacy				x	x
Personal Experiences	Response to Academic Experiences	Challenging Academic Experiences	x	x	x		x
		Accomplishments			x		x
	Outside Influences	Personal Obstacles	x	x	x	x	x
		Childhood Influences	x		x		x
		Freedom				x	
Literacy Skills	(Literacy) Strategies	Thinking			x	x	x
		Verbal Comm.	x	x	x	x	x
		Written Comm.	x	x	x	x	x
		Listening	x	x	x	x	x
		Reading Ability	x		x	x	x
		Asking Questions	x	x	x	x	x
Influential Factors	Student Inputs	Work Ethic		x	x	x	x
		Lack of Effort	x	x			
	Teacher Factors	Teacher Assistance	x	x	x	x	x
		Teacher Expectations		x		x	
		Family Support		x		x	x
	Psychological Factors	Stress	x		x		x
		Other Sacrifices			x		

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VITA

Julie Annette Miller was born on April 10, 1963 in Independence, Missouri. She lived in the Kansas City, Missouri area with her family. She attended the Independence School District kindergarten through second grade until the family moved to Liberty, MO when she was nine. She was raised in Liberty, MO and attended the Liberty Missouri School District from third through twelfth grade. She graduated from Liberty Senior High School in 1981. She did not further her education until thirteen years after her high school graduation, at which time she then attended Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Missouri. Julie graduated summa cum laude from Central Missouri State University in December 1989 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. Her certifications included Middle School Language Arts 5-9, Elementary Education 1-6, and she minored in Art K-8.

Julie began her teaching career as a part-time elementary art teacher in Gallatin, MO in January 1999. The next year she began teaching full-time in the Santa Fe School District teaching Art K-12, where she taught from 1999-2001. Julie Miller then worked as a teacher in the Carrollton School District from 2001-2007. She taught Art grades 7 through 12. In 2007, she went to the Liberty Missouri School District, where she has been teaching Art at the high school level to the present date. During her tenure in the Liberty School District, Julie served on various leadership teams and pursued her Masters in School Administration from the William Woods University, Fulton, Missouri in 2007. During her coursework, Julie wrote her thesis titled *Improving Adolescent Literacy*. In 2009, Julie was awarded the Master in Secondary Administration Degree in the spring of 2009. In January 2010, she began her work toward her Doctorate Degree in School Administration at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Upon the completion of her degree requirements, Julie will continue teaching in the Liberty School District until she seeks a position in school administration and pursues research interests related to education.

Julie Miller is a member of the National Education Association, Missouri and the Parent Teacher Association in the Liberty Public School District. She is currently serving as a Professional Learning Community Leader for her department.