



JOURNAL OF  
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# *JOURNAL OF SCHOOL CONNECTIONS*

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**Length of manuscript.** A manuscript should be 25-35 pages (including references, tables, and figures). All manuscripts must be page numbered and double-spaced in 12- point font with 1-inch margins all around.

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## Editors' Introduction

Welcome to the second volume of *Journal of School Connections (JSC)*! We are delighted to present you with four papers which our Editorial Review Board, Guest Reviewers, and we, believe make valuable contributions to the understanding of relevant and current educational issues that impact teaching and learning success.

As in our first volume, the four presented studies include both quantitative and qualitative methods, and address learners' needs from early education through adolescence. Using a qualitative methodology, Purcell-Gates and Rojas examine early literacy classrooms in Costa Rica, and suggest that differences between traditional American versus traditional Latino classrooms may contribute to the difficulty many Latino students encounter when attending school in the United States. Casey applies qualitative methodology to examine exemplary teaching practices in a middle-school literacy classroom and reveals several findings which extend and even contradict the existing knowledge base in that area. Massey, Brown, Graeber, Johnson, and Learned use a qualitative approach to study adolescents, this time focusing on students' reflections of themselves as literacy learners. Like Casey, their results also reveal unexpected findings. Yin and Hare implement a quantitative approach to investigate the relative effectiveness of pullout versus inclusive instruction for English Language Learners, concluding that little statistical support exists for the clear advantage of one approach over the other.

Taken together, these articles address two of the most pressing issues facing educators today: the education of students from non-mainstream American backgrounds (Purcell-Gates & Rojas, and Yin & Hare), and the education of adolescents (Casey, and Massey, Brown, Graeber, Johnson, & Learned). Purcell-Gates' and Rojas's findings suggest that a greater emphasis on positive affect and relationship building between American teachers and their students from Hispanic backgrounds could potentially enhance these students' academic success. Yin and Hare find that, statistically, both pullout and inclusive classrooms equally support English Language Learners' literacy development. Massey, Brown, Graeber, Johnson, and Learned determine that American adolescents clearly differentiate between in-school and out-of-school literacies but, surprisingly, find little support for the notion that all students desire the presence of more digital literacies in school. Additionally, they report an unexpectedly wide range of digital capabilities among the participating students. Casey concludes her examination of adolescent literacy education with the caution that the general notion of "exemplary literacy practices" is constantly changing in response to students' (and teachers') needs and contexts. This suggests that while learning exemplary practices in theory is foundational for all teachers, these practices must always be qualified by situational variables.

We invite you to read the described papers and comment on them in letters to the Editors. Furthermore, we encourage you to submit your own manuscripts for publication consideration in *JSC* and/or join our Editorial Review Board.

**DIANE H. TRACEY**  
Editor

**JENNIFER J.-L. CHEN**  
Editor

## **Leading with the Heart: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Latino Cultural Model of *Educación***

**VICTORIA PURCELL-GATES**  
*University of British Columbia*

with

**INGRID BUSTOS ROJAS**  
*Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica*

*This case study examined the Latino cultural model of educación as it is instantiated in the Costa Rican system of schooling. The purpose of the analysis was to inform non-Latino North American teachers of the model in light of the increasing number of students in the schools from Latino and immigrant backgrounds. The analysis is framed by sociocultural theories of learning and by Noddings' culture of caring theory (2002). The data were collected as part of a larger ethnography of literacy practice in and out of school in Costa Rica. Data for this analysis included: (a) classroom observations; (b) teacher interviews; (c) interviews with Ministry of Public Education (MEP) personnel; (d) curriculum documents. Analysis included iterative coding of transcripts, documents, and field notes for evidence of the construct of educación and deeper understanding of its cultural roots. In addition to providing cross-cultural understanding for teachers dealing with increasingly multi-cultural student bodies, the author proposes further study of the value of incorporating a culture of care into North American schools for all students.*

*This study was funded by the Spencer Foundation and the Canada Research Chairs Program of Canada.*

## **Leading with the Heart: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Latino Cultural Model of *Educación***

The purpose of this case study is to provide a cross-cultural perspective on cultural orientations to education – orientations that influence pedagogy and learning by teachers and students as members of their cultural

communities (Mayring & von Rhoeneck, 2003). Specifically, we focus on the cultural construct of *education* and one of the primary ways in which that construction differs between Latino and Non-Latino western cultures. One area of contrast is reflected in the relative role(s) played by the cognitive and the affective dimensions of learning and teaching. Latino scholars point out that within the Latino construction of education, the role of the affect is situated within a cultural frame that places learning and teaching within the deeply-held belief that the primary role of education is to inculcate children into shared values and the attitudes and behaviors that follow. Within this frame, the family assumes the primary responsibility for *educación* (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valdés 1996, Valenzuela, 1999).

Within non-Latino Western cultures such as those of the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, education is more synonymous with schooling. There is a greater weight placed on the cognitive and the teaching and learning of skills and strategies, content and concepts (Mayring, 2003; Nodding, 1992).

The need to continue the search for more effective education for underachieving students motivates the choice of the focus on cross-cultural differences of constructions of education. Western educational systems are increasingly de-emphasizing the non-cognitive dimensions of learning and teaching (see, for example, the websites of the U.S. Education Department for research and programs, [www.ies.ed.gov](http://www.ies.ed.gov), and [www.ed.gov/programs](http://www.ed.gov/programs)). This is in striking contrast to the ‘affective turn’ (Mayring, 2003) taken by many educational psychologists in the last two decades (e.g. Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993; Strike & Posner, 1992) who expanded early views of learning as mental ‘cognitive change’ (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gerzog, 1982) to include social and emotional aspects. These contexts were seen to support rational processes (Duit, 2000).

While this recent work has brought emotion, motivation, and social context back into the picture of teaching and learning, it has not located these dimensions outside of the classroom. By looking cross-culturally, it is possible to do so, and in the process provide greater depth and understanding to the differences in the experience of schooling by children from different cultural communities.

The data for this present analysis come from an ethnographic study of community literacy practice and early literacy instruction in Costa Rica. I was aided in this analysis by my colleague Ingrid Bustos Rojas from the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica.



### ***Theoretical Frames and Review of Research***

This study is framed by a theory of learning that asserts that all learning, including language and literacy development, occurs within social and cultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1986; Bourdieu, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 2006; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998). Within this frame, learners, through social interaction, appropriate the values, beliefs, patterns of behavior, and abilities practiced by members of their cultural communities.

Nodding's (1992) frame of the Culture of Caring also informed this analysis. This theory asserts that schools and teachers should center students' learning on an ethic of caring, an ethic that nurtures and values relationships. Nodding positions her theory of caring within feminist theory in which 'natural caring' is assumed to be a feminine stance – nurture and care for the well-being and development of others – 'attentive love' (2002, p. 289). Natural caring is defined by Nodding as "a form of caring that does not require an ethical effort to motivate it (although it may require considerable physical and mental effort in responding to needs)" (Flinders, 2001, p. 211).

Nodding views education broadly as "a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation" (2002, p. 283). As such it places the nexus of caring and education in the home. From this Nodding asserts that schools should employ, as much as possible, the sort of methods found in best homes (2002). Nodding's vision of education from a caring perspective involves teachers demonstrating their authentic caring through relationships with students, relationships that include genuine dialogue as well as actions. It includes a stance of confirmation – affirmation and encouragement.

Within the socio-cognitive and sociocultural frames of learning, many researchers have turned to addressing the perpetual underachievement of marginalized learners in the U.S. and the world over through a cultural difference lens. Valenzuela (1999) raised these issues in her study of the underachievement of Latino high school students in Texas, suggesting that culturally different perspectives on the role of the affective dimension in achievement contribute to the high drop-out rate of Latino students in the U.S. Thus, she places part of the responsibility for this high drop-out rate on cultural differences between home and school for these students. She calls for more cross-cultural studies of learning and achievement to address issues of underachievement of children from linguistic and ethnic minority communities in the U.S.

Although many educators and educational researchers are aware of the need for comparative, cross-cultural research in light of the growing migration across national and cultural borders and its impact on schools and schooling, very little actually exists (Crossley, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). This lack of research is particularly true within the field of literacy research, especially literacy research that looks across national borders. Within the U.S., we can find research that considers issues of cultural differences across home and school boundaries (Delpit, 1988; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). However, none of this research takes the exploration across national borders into the native communities from which the cultural constructions of education emanate. This study sought to address this gap.

Nodding's theory of caring has relevance for the study of underachievement of Latino students in U.S. schools, according to Valenzuela (1999). Nodding's placement of the center of education in the home resonates with the Latino conceptualization of *educación* which embodies the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning (Valenzuela, 1999). Among many Latino cultures, *educación* goes beyond the North American and European concept of *schooling* and, rather, is centered within the family. The family is considered primarily responsible for the *educación* of the children, and this education is about much more than cognitive skill and knowledge acquisition. It also includes – in fact is embedded within – the teaching and learning of values and morals. To be viewed as *mal educado* is to be considered rude, possessing no manners, and this lack of education reflects directly on the family with whom the responsibility lies for *educación* (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valdés, 1996). *Ser bien educado* (to be well-educated) within the Latino community includes values, morals, attitudes, and behaviors in addition to skills and knowledge.

Valenzuela (1999) calls upon both Nodding's theory of care in the schools as well as the Latino value of *educación* in her exploration of factors related to the chronic underachievement of Latino students in American schools. In her seminal study of U.S.-Mexican high school students and their teachers, reported in her book, *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela concluded that a significant factor in the high rate of school dropout and failure among Mexican American youth is related to the lack of authentic caring, as defined by Nodding, in the U.S. schools and their teachers -- a form of caring for which the students hold a cultural model as part of the Latino concept of *educación*. While the teachers in the high

school demanded that students care about school before they would be able to teach them, the students argued that “they should be assessed, valued, and engaged as a whole people, not as automatons in baggy pants” (p. 61). In other words, the students demanded that the teachers should care about *them* before they would be expected to care about school and the learning that was offered. The students “articulate a vision of education that parallels the Mexican concept of *educación*. That is, they prefer a model of schooling premised on respectful, caring relations” (p. 61).

Few non-Latino educators in North America know about this cultural model of education within the Latino community. Among those, even fewer have a deep understanding of how it plays out within Latino families. Most discussions of this model consider only the home context, reasonably so given the centrality of the home in the concept. However, home and school are always culturally related. Increased understanding of this relationship will come from exploring the relationship through this cultural model of education that places caring and nurturing relationships at the forefront and that includes values, beliefs, and attitudes in the very definition. Further, a deeper grasp of the instantiation of the concept will come from studying it in action within a cultural context for which it is native. I address this need within this study.

The strength of the *educación* construction within Latino countries is revealed by the absence of any research from those countries on the topic. In policy statements, curricula, and educational research, it is never mentioned explicitly. Rather, like all primary and deep cultural constructions, it is taken for granted and treated implicitly. Certainly, it is never treated as a variable that could be isolated and studied. Discussions of the data from which this case study evolved with native Costa Rican and Mexican colleagues resulted in initial expressions of incomprehension and then surprise. The incomprehension arose from the natives’ failure to understand what the researcher had ‘noticed’ since they would never notice such things (having taken them for granted). The surprise came when confronted with data that ‘documented’ the phenomenon and it was ‘recognized.’ In cultural ethnographic circles, this would be considered as an instance of ‘the fish learning to see the water’ phenomenon (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

*Research Questions:* The research questions for this analysis included: (a) How are the culturally-based ideals of *educación* and authentic caring reflected in the Costa Rican construction of schooling? and (b) How are these values instantiated within the primary grade classrooms?

## Method

The Larger Study: Literacy Practice and Early Literacy Instruction in Costa Rica

This analysis is based on a portion of the data collected for a larger study of literacy practice in Costa Rica. In collaboration with officials from the Ministry of Public Education in Costa Rica (*Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica (MEP)*), I conducted a six-month ethnography in Costa Rica, seeking to explore factors that may account for many of the difficulties that are experienced by poor and marginalized children in the Costa Rican Schools, particularly those of Nicaraguan immigrants – a focus suggested by the Costa Rican collaborators.

Within this, I explored interactions between the children's experiences with reading and writing in their lives outside of school – in their homes and communities – and those within their classrooms in one public school. For purposes of this presentation, I will describe the methods that relate directly to the case study rather than the methods that supported the larger study.

### *Research Site*

The school for the study was located in an area near the capital city of San José. It was chosen through discussion with personnel from the Ministry of Public Education. At the time of selection, this school had high numbers of Nicaraguan immigrants with the remainder of children predominantly coming from low-SES Costa Rican homes. The principal at the time of selection was well-known for her efforts to improve the lives and school success of the Nicaraguan children, and she was, thus, open to having an observer in the classrooms who was exploring ways to help the children. The school was located in a primarily middle-class neighborhood, and its student body majority of low-SES children reflected the relatively recent abandonment of the public schools by Costa Ricans who could afford private education for their children.

Observations were done in a kindergarten class (ages 4-5; class ratio of one teacher for 27 children); a first grade class (ages 6-7; class ratio of one teacher for 31 children); and a second grade class (ages 7-9; class ratio of one teacher for 35 children). None of the teachers had aides and all instruction was whole-class with no small-group work, with the exception of the kindergarten class where children worked/played in centers at specified times each day. At times, learning specialists would pull out special needs children from the first and second grade classes for specialized instruction and help. The first and second grade teachers followed a strict scope and sequence curriculum with little variation. The kindergarten teacher, as

part of the pre-school department, approached instruction from a classical early childhood perspective with the focus on play and social and emotional development. Explicit teaching of early literacy or math skills was forbidden by the pre-school department of the ministry.

### ***Data Collection and Data Sources***

A total of 150 hours of observation was carried out in the kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade classrooms in this one public school. In addition, I visited four other public schools for one day each to verify the typicality of the observations made in the focus school. Finally, to obtain a more complete picture of education in Costa Rica, I visited a private school in the Central Valley (home of the capital city and most of the industry and population of the country) to observe the instruction in pre-school through second grade. During all of the classroom observations, I noted the instructional routines and methodological approaches in all subject areas, particularly for literacy.

I visited each kinder, first-, and second- grade classroom at least one time per week for a duration of 2-4 hours each visit. During the observations, I sat in a desk and assumed a passive, non-participant stance. I noted all of the instructional activities and routines, capturing teacher and student language as well. I also noted all of the texts that were read or written within the instructional period as well as the texts that formed the environment of the classrooms. I was assisted in these observations by a Costa Rican research assistant who was obtaining her teaching certificate at one of the state universities. This assistant helped to translate when needed and she served as a source of insider information regarding what was happening in the classrooms. One of the goals of the study was to come to a deep understanding of the culture of schooling, instruction, and learning within the Costa Rican context, acting under the assumption that it would be much different from that of North America and so would require much attention and cultural analysis for me as an outsider.

Following each observation, I transcribed my notes and constructed initial analytic notes and memos. It was during this phase of the data collection that I first noticed the striking ways that affective elements were woven into the daily instruction and interactions among teachers and students.

To provide essential context for the research questions relating to the larger study, I also interviewed MEP officials, teachers, community leaders, and officials of organizations devoted to working with children and immigrant children, in particular, in areas of schooling and human rights. I engaged in a total of 21 interviews, each lasting an average of two hours. In addition, I collected and analyzed MEP curriculum documents

for preschool and first-second grades. In sum, data sources for this case study included (a) classroom observations; (b) teacher interviews; (c) interviews with MEP personnel; and (d) curriculum documents.

### ***Data Analysis***

All of the field notes, interview transcripts, and scanned documents were entered into the *ATLAS.ti* (2007) qualitative software program. This program allows researchers to upload primary documents such as field notes, interview transcripts, scans of print materials, and photos and to conduct an iterative process of coding and analysis across them. Using the coding conventions for this program, the data were coded for classroom instances of affect employed by teachers and students and for explicit naming and evidence of values, beliefs, and attitudes in descriptions and enactments of literacy curricula and instruction. Themes were identified with constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and participant checks were conducted with teachers and with Ministry of Education officials to confirm emerging insights and findings.

## **Results**

The cultural construction of *educación* (see definition above re Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; and Valdés, 1996), with its emphasis on the family as the primary site of learning and on values and morals taught and learned within respectful and caring relationship, was exemplified and revealed through the analysis of the data. I will first present the data relevant to this from each data source. Following, I will draw it together in a portrait of the ways that the cultural construction of *educación* permeates the educational system and classrooms of Costa Rica.

### ***Curriculum Documents***

During the course of this study, the Curriculum Development Division of the MEP was busy putting the finishing touches on a new overarching curriculum document on a theme that they termed *Transversalidad*. This document was intended to establish a vision with goals and plans for the Costa Rican schools for the coming decade. As a curriculum document, it was embedded within cultural constructions of education, and an analysis of the content revealed evidence of the construct of *educación*.

*Transversalidad* is a term that does not seem to have a direct translation into English. However, the essence of its meaning is in the envisioned connections between school and the world: its problems, its challenges, its realities that the students will face.

An important aspect of transversalidad "...is that it advocates

processes that tend to promote, from within the classroom setting, the development of competencies for life” (Bustos Rojas, 2006, p. 28). These competencies include:

**Knowledge:** ...the set of concepts, facts or procedures that the individual must master in order to act in an efficient manner in the development of any given process.

**Abilities:** ...the mental processes that involve reflection and critical analysis, amongst others; the emotional component that allows the individual to identify and respond in a constructive way to personal and others emotions....communicative skills that lead to decision-making based on pertinent information ....

**Values:** ...those practices such as solidarity, equity, respect, honesty, and so forth that, in the frame of the personal and surrounding conditions, constitute a fundamental dimension of the individual.

**Attitudes:** ...the way in which the challenges of life are confronted... (p. 29).

Of these four elements of transversalidad, three are focused on emotional abilities, values, and attitudes. Knowledge is included but it does not dominate.

*Curricular Applications.* An examination of the Ministry Programs of Study revealed the instantiation of this concept of transversalidad with its emphasis on values, emotions, and attitudes. For each content area, the documents lay out in table form the curricular objectives, contents, procedures, values and attitudes, and assessments. By explicitly naming and according a place in the scope and sequence to values and attitudes, the Costa Rican educators assume (and ensure) the essential role of these dimensions in the education of their children.

An example of the contents of the Values and Attitudes columns for Reading and Writing (*Español* is the term that encompasses these topics in the Costa Rican curriculum) lists the following (Ministerio de *Educación Pública*, 2005): Confidence in the ability to produce written messages; Persistence in learning written expression; Creativity in the spontaneous written productions; Perseverance in the bettering of their writing; and Acceptance of criticism as a contribution from others to the betterment of their writing. Confidence, Persistence, Creativity, and Acceptance – all values and attitudes considered worth teaching along with content. From a non-Latino western educational psychology perspective, characteristics such as confidence, persistence, and acceptance are considered important affective components of motivation and self-regulation, a dimension of



learning that has gained more prominence in learning theories (Gläser-Zikuda & Mayring, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997).

*Interviews.* The belief that emotions and feelings enable content learning is inherent within the concept of *educación*, as well. Within this model, the affective must precede the cognitive if learning is to occur. This belief was apparent in all of the interviews that were done with teachers and with ministry personnel. Few participants could articulate this explicitly (see previous discussion) but it was present in all of their discussions of teaching and learning. For example, when I was planning with Ingrid the many workshops with teachers to present the outcomes of the larger study, Ingrid always insisted that these events start with a story, often with music, and often followed by a prayer in order to emotionally engage the group. I, on the other hand, as a cultural construction of a non-Latino western culture, always wanted to start right off with descriptions of the research questions and the methods! This dissonance and misunderstandings occurred repeatedly until I ‘got it,’ helped to a great extent by participating in numerous conferences and workshops planned by others.

Another striking exemplar of this belief arose as part of an interview with the director of an NGO (non-governmental organization) devoted to improving the academic performance of immigrant children in the country. As part of this interview the director shared the publication *Educación Sin Fronteras* (Education Without Borders) (Contreras, 2004), a book published by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of the International Organization for Migrants (OIM) and the Foundation Costa Rica-USA (CR-USA) in partnership with the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica.

The OIM and CR-USA sponsor a program for migrant children in the schools called *Mediación*. This program trains volunteer older students to work with young migrant children to help them ‘catch up’ to their Costa Rican peers. In the description of this tutoring model in the book, we can see the focus on the affective: “*Mediación* stimulates the development of intelligence and the acquisition of abilities and strengths in two dimensions: the affective-motivational and the cognitive” (p. 85). Contreras goes on to explain:

From here is born a strong idea that has become one of the themes of *mediación*: **Corazón + Bombillo = Mediación**. The “corazón (heart)” represents the affective-motivational (the emotional intelligence, the psychosocial), and the “bombillo (light bulb)” represents the cognitive (rational intelligence, mind, knowledge). Both elements come together in pedagogical practice in order to give feeling/emotion to the *mediación*, in this order: *primero el corazón y luego la mente* (first the heart and then the mind) (p. 85).



*In the Classrooms.* How does this look on the ground, within individual classrooms? Many examples of the focus on values and attitudes were observed over the 5 months of classroom observation in kinder, grade 1, and grade 2. The value of spirituality was applied in this very Catholic country with the daily lesson in religion – Catholicism. In addition, each day was begun with a prayer that was led by the teacher, and this was repeated throughout the day whenever a new teacher came in to the class, such as the English teacher, and the computer teacher. Further, the kindergarten children always said a prayer before eating their *merienda* – snack – together in a circle outside on the play yard.

In all of the classrooms, one could see, posted around the rooms, signs that teach or remind the children of the politeness values. The posters or signs in the kindergarten exhorted, for example:

- *Respetar al compañeros* (Respect your classmates)
- *Cuidar los juguetes del Kinder* (Take care of the toys)
- *Escuchar a los compañeros* (Listen to your classmates)
- *Lavantar la mano y esperar el turno* (Wash your hands and wait your turn)
- *Caminar en el aula* (Walk in the classroom)
- *Hacer fila para entrar y subirse al tobogán* (Make a line to come in and to climb up the slide)
- *Pedir permiso para ir al baño* (Ask permission to go to the bathroom)

It is telling that these types of imperatives would be thought of as ‘rules’ in North American classrooms, but the research assistant and the teachers always referred to them as ‘values’ (“*los valores*”).

Also emphasized by the teachers in their lessons and through signs posted on the walls were the ‘politeness’ terms that the children were expected to use: *Buenas días* (good morning), *Hasta mañana* (until tomorrow -- a polite way of leaving), *Hágame un favor* (Do me a favor), *Muchas gracias* (thank you), *Con permiso* (excuse me), and so on.

Teachers were constantly observed ‘teaching’ values such as responsibility – at home and at school (and this went beyond just doing their school work. It included helping their mothers, cleaning their rooms, and so on). The value placed on solidarity and community revealed itself in the practice of encouraging the children to help each other with their school work – a practice specifically discouraged (and at times punished) in North American schools. Work time in the Costa Rican classrooms was very active and noisy as the children stood to cut their handouts and glue them into their notebooks, converse with their friends who had wandered

over, call out to the teacher and/or the class in general that they were finished (*'ya terminé!*), and walk around to see how the others were doing or to borrow pencils or glue. Teachers implicitly allowed them to help each other by ignoring the activity. This value was explicitly evident in the directions on many of the worksheets, "Help anyone who needs it."

The value of warmth and affection was apparent in the ways in which the teachers spoke to the children. Terms such as "*Mi amor*" and "*Mi corazón*" were woven throughout the teachers' responses to the children. These were often accompanied with big hugs or kisses (for the most part prohibited or strongly discouraged in the current North American context). Following is a partial list of *'palabras de cariño'* (caring words) used by the teachers, provided by the research assistant and the teachers:

- *Mi vida* (my life)
- *Mi corazón* (my heart)
- *Mi sol* (my sun)
- *Corazoncito o corazones* (diminutive variations on 'heart')
- *Mi cielo* (my heaven)
- *Mi tesoro* (my treasure)
- *Chiquillos* (a respectful version of "little children")
- *Preciosa* (precious)
- *Mi amorcito* (a diminutive of "my love")
- *Mi cosita bella* (my sweet little thing)
- *Mamita* (for a girl)
- *Papito* (for a boy)
- *Bella/o* (pretty/beautiful)
- *Lindísimo* (so nice/so pretty)

Teachers employed these terms throughout the day, while children were lining up, misbehaving, doing their school work, delivering notes from home, taking exams, and so on. The terms were used as a matter of course and without conscious thought, as their use was an integral part of the model of teaching and learning that the teachers were operating within. Following are some examples of their use from the field notes (Note that school begins in Costa Rica in February of each year):

*FN March 13, 2006; First Grade Classroom; Context: The children are practicing making the letter 'M' in their notebooks.*

Kids start to work; T goes around and helps. T keeps calling kids 'mi vida' as she helps them. K says is a word of *cariño* – *afectivo* – You are my life. T also uses 'preciosa'.

*FN March 24, 2006. First Grade Classroom; Context: The children are working on a mathematics worksheet. The afternoon teacher (the schools all have two shifts, and a fourth grade teacher teaches in the room in the afternoon) comes in to get supplies from the closet at the back of the room.*

When another teacher comes in (she shares the room; 4th grade; gets material from the new cupboard in the back) she passes by students in the row and comments on their work: “Bonita!”; “Qué linda!”

*FN April 6, 2006. First Grade Classroom; Context: The children have just finished sharing their oral stories about a duckling that they made up as groups.*

T gives lots of praise: Qué lindo! Qué lindo! And kids want to come up individually and tell stories. M gets up and tells his own duck story. So do others: they’ve been inspired! (e.g. an ugly duck turns into a beautiful duck – a girl (The Ugly Duckling?). We put the desks back.

*FN May 9, 2006; Second Grade Classroom; Context: There is a substitute teacher (ST). The children are working on identifying words (i.e. working on ‘what is a word’) and cutting them out of newspaper pages that the substitute teacher brought in. She is circulating and helping them.*

ST uses many tierno words, gestures, and intonations (e.g., mi amor, rubbing her hands over a boy’s very short hair).

*FN March 3, 2006. Kindergarten Classroom. Context: Students have just finished their ‘center time’ and have pulled together as a group in front of the teacher.*

8:45: Back in the circle with the Centers cleaned up. T asks the kids what they did in the centers and they describe/share. In answer to a girl’s question re: whether they have computer today, T says “No, mi amor.”

Finally, a field note from one of the kindergarten observations reveals the cultural nature of these behaviors through the need to switch languages:

*FN April 21, 2006. Kindergarten Classroom. Context: The English teacher (ET) has entered the classroom for one of the twice weekly sessions of English instruction. There is a great deal of noise and activity, making it difficult for her to be heard. Trying to bring about order, she reverts to Spanish. I note:*

When controlling in English she is not able to use words of cariño; the kids only really respond to Spanish. E.g. “Get back!” Nothing; “Un poquito de atrás, mis amores!” They move back.

The theme of caring and relationship was carried out, also, in the kindergarten class when the teacher invited the parents to write letters of affection to their children. The entire back wall of the classroom was papered with these letters, and each child was excited and proud to have his or her letter displayed. Here is the content of one of them:

Para (Name of Child).

*Pienso en tí mi niña preciosa,* (I think of you my precious child,)

*Iluminas mi existencia.* (You illumine my existence).

*Tú tenrura y delicadeza* (Your tenderness and delicacy)

*son comparables con una flor.* (are comparable to a flower.)

*Quien te Ama* (Who loves you)

*Tu Mamí* (Your Mommy)

The children reflected, in their actions and talk, this environment of love and affection. They exhibited great warmth and tenderness toward their classmates, teachers, and other adults. There was a lot of hugging, kissing, and concern for any sort of trouble such as illness, accident, emotional upset that may beset their classmates. This was as true for the boys as for the girls.

## Discussion

This case study of the cultural construction of *educación* with its emphasis on the family as the site of teaching of values, attitudes, and behaviors through respectful and caring relationship was not intended to explore the efficacy of such instruction in the classroom with regard to learning. Rather, my intent was to provide a layered description of this construct and the ways in which it permeates curriculum and instruction in a country in which *educación* is a deeply embedded value. My assumed audience for this description is non-Latino/a western educators and teachers who may benefit from this cultural knowledge as they strive to understand their Latino/a students who are quickly becoming the majority in many areas of the U.S. and whose population is rapidly increasing in Canada (Espinosa, et al., 2007).

Case studies such as this one are not designed to answer questions such as whether or not the use of affect in the classrooms increases cognitive learning. They do, however, provide insight into phenomena as they take place within naturally occurring contexts and these insights have the promise of contributing to theory and greater understanding, in this case of teaching and learning within different cultural contexts (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). We can speculate, however, on the role of cultural models of education held by students in classrooms that operate within different

models, and I will do this later in this section.

Before I proceed, however, I wish to note some aspects of the research context of this particular study relevant to this issue. My research focus during my time in Costa Rica was on the experiences of the Nicaraguan immigrants in school. A significant element of this study, given my research interests up to this time, was on the cultural practices of literacy that were evident in the Nicaraguan immigrant community and the ways in which they aligned and did not align with those assumed by the schools. My data collection in the classrooms had two purposes: (1) to document the literacy practices in the classroom; and (2) to learn about the model of instruction in the Costa Rican schools so that I could contribute to the construction of new instructional activities that would be culturally congruent for the teachers and the Ministry. In sum, I was not focusing on the issue of the affective versus the cognitive in the classroom instruction. For this reason, while I have rich description of the ways that the construct of *educación* is instantiated within the Costa Rican primary classrooms, I do not have the data that would allow me to examine specifically how it relates to cognitive learning.

### ***More Than Being Nice; Engaging the Heart.***

Costa Rica's model for pedagogy and schooling clearly reflects the Latino cultural model for *educación*. Education for values, attitudes, and morals is considered as appropriate and needed in the schools as in the families. The activities of the school are more explicitly focused on the acquisition of cognitive and technical skills and abilities than the home. Nevertheless, this instruction is cradled in an environment of nurture and care in the service of respectful relationship – all elements of the culture of caring that Nodding asserts are the basis of all learning. In such an environment, home and school are seamlessly connected. In Costa Rica, educators, parents (including the Nicaraguan parents), teachers, and students all seem to agree on what education means and on the mutually supportive roles played by home and school. There is cultural congruence around the issue of education.

The meaning of the emphasis on the affective, including the terms of endearment, in the classrooms is complex. Clearly, the cultural meaning of *educación* goes far beyond, and deeper than, the behavior of 'being nice' to the students. It reflects the very essence of the respect and relationship that is implicated in the values, beliefs, and attitudes that drive the construct of *educación*. That this caring relationship is reminiscent of that between parent and child is no accident, given the assumption of the family as the primary source of education.

The evidence provided by the content of the official curriculum

documents-- the instantiated curriculum in the classrooms--and the relationships between the teachers and the students, specifically documented through speech acts, point to the ways that *educación* in the native Latino classroom embodies Noddings' (who also relies on Martin Buber (1958) for this) notion of confirmation as acts of affirming and encouraging the best in others (1998). One of Noddings' elements of caring in the classroom is dialogue (1998). The *palabras de cariño* in the Costa Rican classrooms illustrate one way that this is realized in the early grades. That this is a Latino construct, and not only unique to these classrooms in Costa Rica, is illustrated by the fact that Latino/a teachers in the U.S. also use these 'caring words' with their students (Flora Rodriguez-Brown, personal communication, August 10, 2007). In Costa Rica, teacher training includes an explicit focus on the use of such terms to enhance relationship and learning in the classrooms (Karla Brenes, personal communication, February 27, 2006).

The data from one case study cannot be generalized, of course, to all classrooms. Nor am I, obviously, suggesting that simply teaching North American teachers to use *palabras de cariño* will change the achievement levels of Latino students in North America. This aspect of Costa Rican classrooms is deeply embedded in a complex cultural construction of home, family, and schooling. The central value of this analysis is to provide non-Latino/a North American teachers and teacher educators with knowledge, and a deeper understanding, of a cultural model of education that is held by many Latino/a students and their parents who find themselves negotiating education within a different cultural framework.

It is important to acknowledge that cultural models run deep. Not only are they hard to see as 'models' by those who hold them, they are also sources of cultural conflict and difficulty when they run up against other models. Valenzuela (1999) concluded that the failure of Latino-American children in the U.S. schools may very well be related to the mismatch between the children's expectation, and need, for authentic caring and relationship and the school's expectation for the students to "care" about their learning and knowledge acquisition in the absence of such relationship. I would agree, acknowledging that learning in school is always a complex enterprise that reflects the synergistic action of many different factors such as teacher knowledge and training, student background, instructional strategies, and resources.

### ***Should Others Adopt this Model?***

As stated earlier, the data and analysis for this case study do not allow for statements of generalizability. This is especially true when dealing with

cultural models. However, we can speculate about some of the elements of the model of *educación* that might make sense within the more cognitive-focused model of schooling in North America. This type of speculation, after all, is one of the presumed benefits of cross-cultural research.

*Research on the role of affect on cognitive learning.* From an educational psychology perspective (which permeates the North American model of education), a great deal of research has demonstrated the effect of affective dimensions on learning in school. Mayring and von Rhoeneck (2003), in their edited book *Learning Emotions: The Influence of Affective Factors on Classroom Learning*, stated three research-based reasons why it is worthwhile to study emotions: (1) Emotions influence the quality of learning and achievement of students; (2) Emotions are directly linked to students' sense of well-being and classroom environments will affect this sense; and (3) The quality of the social interactions in the classroom (the source of learning) and emotions form the basis for social interactions.

A review of the educational psychology research on the links between affect and cognition concludes that positive affect will enhance, and in some ways allow, learning in the classroom. From this we can speculate that North American and other non-Latino models of education might benefit from taking a page from the model of *educación*, with its emphasis on positive values, attitudes, and relationships of care and respect.

*Care and respect.* Others from non-Latino backgrounds (in addition to Noddings) have also called for such a focus when considering the education of children in North American schools. As an example, Noblit and Rogers (1995) studied the ways that authentic caring played out in the classrooms of two African-American teachers in an urban elementary school in the U.S. Sixty-five percent of their students were African American and low-income. The authors concluded that,

...although children may learn in the absence of caring, without the presence of a caring teacher these possibilities are greatly diminished. As a fourth-grader Candace remarked, "If a teacher doesn't care about you, it affects your mind. You feel like you're nobody, and it makes you want to drop out of school (p. 5).

Caring in the classrooms studied by Noblit and Rogers (2005) was realized in many of the same ways as in the Costa Rican classrooms. Respect and standards were also values that the teachers embodied, as exemplified in the students' reports that the teachers not only helped them with their work, they did not demean them for needing help. Further, the children also reported that the good teachers talked with them, bringing to mind again Noddings' (2002) caring component of dialogue: "Talk



became the currency of caring; each opportunity to talk came to have a history and a future.”

Finally, touching was often a part of the relationships that Noblit and Rogers (2005) observed. While the authors concede that touching is a politically sensitive topic in the North American context, they concluded that in the classrooms they observed touching was a sign of a relationship and not just an indication of the authority of an adult over a child.

I agree with Noblit and Rogers (2005) that the construction of caring as a value in North American schools is a goal worth considering, the pursuit of which would include further research as well as deeper cultural analysis of constructs of education in the North American schools. This cross-cultural case study that sought to understand the Latino concept of *educación* through North American eyes will contribute to the understanding and knowledge that is needed to reach this goal.

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**Intersections and interactions:  
A case study of a seventh grade teacher's  
practices with struggling readers and writers**

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*This study investigated the beliefs and practices of a seventh grade language arts teacher identified as effective in supporting struggling readers and writers. Transcripts of interviews, classroom observations, and relevant documents were coded for linguistic composition and communication themes (Cazden, 2001; Wells, 1993, 2001). The data suggest that this teacher supported his struggling students by scaffolding literacy events with tightly controlled exchanges, varying grouping structures, and making use of the material and human resources available outside of the classroom. Understanding this teacher's beliefs and practices in relation to the unique activity systems within and around his classroom suggests that effective middle school literacy instruction needs to be understood as situated within a specific context. This conceptualization challenges universal descriptions of best practice which suggest that specific strategies work across contexts.*

**Introduction**

Middle School. This descriptor is often associated with images of academic and social hierarchies, adolescent angst and insecurity, and the sometimes slippery slope of leaving the dependence of childhood for the growing independence of young adulthood. Appropriating the academic knowledge required by schools in the midst of this social instability is particularly difficult for those students who feel insecure about their reading and writing abilities (Atwell, 1997; Finders, 2007; Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine & Constant, 2004). The teachers who work with these struggling students face their own challenges in supporting the literacy development of these students who may have a history of frustration and failure (Ivey,

2002; Lewis, 2001). Michael, the subject of this article, is no exception.

I spent six months in Michael's classroom observing his interactions with students and documenting his capacity to motivate struggling readers and writers. Michael's ability to support his students is understood through the socio-cultural lens of teaching and learning, which is the foundation of the data collection, analysis, and conclusions described in this article (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 2002; Leont'ev, 1978; Street, 1995; Wertsch, Minick, & Arns, 1984). This case study of Michael's work is part of a larger study I conducted examining effective practices of middle school language arts teachers.

## **Positioning Theory and Research**

A review of research on literacy instruction offers multiple representations of the role the language arts teacher plays in motivating students' literacy development, beginning with a view of the teacher as a technician and gradually evolving to a more professional representation (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). This professional view of the teacher is positioned within a sociocultural framework. Research on exemplary teachers describes how it is the decisions teachers make in the classroom that motivates learning. These decisions are inclusive of establishing rules and routines, organizing and implementing curricular content, assessing students for individual needs, and building relationships with students and families (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block & Morrow, 2001). The study described in this article is rooted in sociocultural views of teaching and learning as Michael's beliefs and practices are documented through the semiotic interactions that occur between him and his students and the evolving activity systems that contextualize these learning moments (Leander, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Lompscher, 1999; Minick, 1985; Scott, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

### ***Good Teaching: What Works?***

Research on effective literacy practices in primary and intermediate grade classrooms has documented what good teachers know and do when working with children (e.g. Allington & Johnston, 2002; Morrow, Tracey, Woo & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block & Morrow, 2001; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Ruddell, 1995). These teachers are described as designing instruction, activities, and materials based on students' needs, interests, and life experiences (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Block, 2001; Pressley et al., 2001). Middle school teachers, students, and classrooms, however, are not fully represented in this area of research (Casey, 2009).

### ***Situating the Struggling Adolescent Reader and Writer***

Sociocultural theory suggests that the process of teaching and learning must be understood as situated within specific contexts (Cazden, 2001; Engeström et al, 1999; Finders, 1997; Lewis, 2001). There are multiple activity systems that contextualize teaching and learning (Lompscher, 1999; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). These include the unique histories of the participants (i.e., the teacher and students), as well as the shared communities of learning developed within classrooms and schools that both complement and contradict the social communities that are so important to adolescents. Understanding effective middle school teachers' practices requires understanding how teachers and students navigate the multiple activity systems that exist within the classroom. These systems are complicated because in middle school they include the social peer groups that form outside of the classroom space as well as the academic grouping structures (i.e. whole class, small group, individual) constructed by teachers and students within the classroom space. These communities do not exist in isolation but instead intersect and interact with one another to influence learning.

Research offers multiple strategies for supporting the adolescent who struggles with literacy. Some students meet with success when teachers adopt explicit skill instruction with little room for student choice and independence (Dole, Brown, & Trathen 1996; Jacobson, Bonds, Medders, Saenz, Stasch, & Sullivan 2002). Other students are more successful when given opportunity to choose strategies and materials modeled by teachers and then practice these in collaborative peer groups (Boyd, 2002, Casey,, 2009; Ivey, 1999). Some research suggests that effective teachers move across both of these teaching approaches when working with struggling readers and writers (Casey, 2009).

### **Methodology**

The sociocultural framework guiding this research conceptualizes Michael's beliefs and practices as evolving in response to his work with students and the multiple activity systems that inform, and at times impede, these exchanges (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). This study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What does a seventh grade language arts teacher *believe* is important in the literacy instruction of struggling students?
- (2) What are this teacher's *practices* in his work with struggling students?
- (3) What is *the relationship* between this teacher's beliefs and practices for supporting struggling readers and writers?

## ***Setting***

This study focused on one participant, Michael, who turned 25 during the study, and had been teaching seventh grade language arts for four years in a Northeast middle school. Michael was hired shortly after graduating from a nearby university. The middle school is located in Highpoint Township, where less than 10% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The middle school houses 695 seventh graders, with an average of 23.3 students per class. Ninety percent of the students speak English as their first language, 3.0% Spanish, and 1.5% Mandarin Chinese. Five of the 23 students in Michael's class are identified as needing literacy support. Michael's students are primarily Caucasian, ranging from 12 to 13 years of age. Institutional Review Board approvals were received prior to the study and the guidelines were followed throughout. Written consent was obtained from Michael as one of the key participants. Since the research focus was the teacher and not the students, the Institutional Review Board only required consent from Michael. All student and teacher names used throughout this manuscript are pseudonyms.

## ***Michael's Selection***

Michael was selected in conjunction with school and district administrators. The criteria for nomination were based on research findings on effective instruction and other characteristics including: (a) the teacher is primarily responsible for seventh grade language arts instruction, (b) the teacher works with struggling readers and writers (struggling is defined here as students who receive basic skills support for language arts), (c) the struggling students with whom the teacher works are part of a regular education classroom and subject to the same curriculum as their peers who are not identified as struggling, (d) the struggling students with whom the teacher works show improvement on district formal and informal assessments, and (e) the teacher has a positive relationship with students' families and colleagues (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Block, Oakar, & Hurt, 2002; Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1997).

The district language arts supervisor, the building principal, and the building language arts coordinator submitted independent nominations. All three unanimously nominated Michael as a participant.

## ***Data Collection***

Data collected included interviews, observations, field notes, reflective memos, and document retrieval. Multiple methods were used to form a rich description of Michael's beliefs and practices while also serving

to triangulate analysis. All interviews and observations were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author between visits. Michael was interviewed twice using a semi-structured format (Seidman, 1998). The initial interview provided information about Michael's beliefs concerning effective literacy instruction of struggling readers and writers. The second focused on specific instructional episodes observed, providing Michael the opportunity to reflect on practice. Informal conversations between classes and after school were conducted throughout. These were not recorded but were documented in a research journal throughout the day.

Michael was observed six times over approximately four months during the 80-minute language arts block that included working with the struggling students. A rubric was used every fifteen minutes to focus the observations around students' activities (Taylor & Pearson, 2002). The rubric is presented in Appendix A. This rubric was developed based on prior studies of effective teachers in the elementary grades (e.g. Taylor & Pearson, 2002). Weekly lesson plans and student handouts were collected. Photographs of Michael's classroom were used to document how the physical space and print media mediated the students' learning.

### ***Validity***

Michael was given the opportunity to review transcripts and the case description, and request modifications. Interviews, field notes, recorded observations, and documents serve to corroborate similar findings and offer discrepancies between beliefs and practices. A researcher journal and reflective memos were maintained throughout the study by me to focus observations and bracket out preconceived notions. These included notes taken during the school day as well as typed reflections completed at the conclusion of each observation and formal interview.

### ***Coding Scheme***

I transcribed all of the observations and interviews, and analyzed these transcriptions, the lesson plans, and student artifacts to begin identifying themes across the data. Two sets of codes emerged and were used to describe Michael's beliefs and practices. I first coded each observation transcript for the linguistic interactions between Michael and his students. References to beliefs about the nature of these interactions within the interviews were coded as well. I then went back and coded each observation and interview transcript thematically for the types of communication occurring within these interactions (See Appendix B for the coding scheme). Coding for the linguistic interactions offers a picture of how language influences learning while considering the content of these exchanges describes what type of learning is taking place (Bakhtin, 1990; Cazden, 1999; Wells, 1993).



Wells' description of the dominant mode of classroom dialogue falls within initiation – response – feedback/follow up (IRF) (Wells, 1993, 2001) and Cazden's (2001) description of open exchanges, which offers insight into the different ways classroom conversation mediates instructional content. The relationship between Michael's communication practices, the content of his instruction, and the physical tools and spaces in which his practices occur offer a rich portrait of his teaching

### ***Michael's Teaching Beliefs and Practices***

Michael is an avid reader, writer, and artist, and frequently shares his work with students. He believes that literacy is a dynamic multimodal process, and demonstrates his own work as a reader and writer of printed material as well as his work with fixed and moving images to engage students, particularly those struggling with reading and writing. At the time of the study, Michael was reading adolescent and adult fiction and working on a variety of personal writing pieces, photography, and video collages that he frequently brought into the classroom to motivate students' interest in literacy and to model reading and writing strategies.

### ***Michael's Beliefs***

Michael was passionate about literacy. He was always reading new adolescent and adult fiction, developing video diaries and films, and writing original fiction and poetry. His identity as a reader and writer was important to him, and he believed that many adolescents who struggle with literacy do not view themselves as readers and writers. Michael believed that, for struggling students, providing opportunities to read and write without fear of evaluation helps build this identity. In Michael's classroom, students kept a reader's and writer's notebook where they recorded ideas for writing and reflections of their reading. Michael also offered time for students to read and write during the class period.

Michael sought to capitalize on students' natural use of outside literacies such as text messaging and Internet based reading and writing to bridge curricular expectations and to motivate literacy development. He remarked,

I'm a huge advocate of good modern writing. The modern books have people on IM. They have you know a kid in class who is admitting he's a homosexual. You have these things that are real, that people are dealing with.

Michael believed that reading and writing experiences allow students to play with language, which facilitates literacy engagement.



...and it's fun to teach things like, um, compositional risks. In other words, you can bend the rules, you can break the rules a little bit...

Michael believed that beginning with the unconventional offers a window for considering the conventional. For example, Michael opened up one class with a mini-lesson on how authors use dialect within dialogue to create images of characters. These excerpts become a model of writers' craft while also offering the opportunity for the class to discuss the rules the authors "broke" in order to achieve their writing goals.

### ***Michael's Practice***

While Michael believed in the value of constructivist learning opportunities for students, the curriculum and state assessments often dictated different pathways for students' learning. Observations of Michael's practice suggest a tension between what he valued as an educator and what he could operationalize in the classroom. This tension was clear through the units of study documented during my time in Michael's classroom. For instance, when we began our work together, Michael was beginning a Research unit of study. Michael adopted a carefully structured approach to this unit. For example, on February 4th Michael wrote this lesson for his students:

Objective: Students will be able to use the SQ3R method to extract important information from a non-fiction source.

Procedure: 1) Introduction to SQ3R, 2) using a handout and a graphic organizer on marker board, students identify and comprehend the strategies of this method, 3) Whole class read aloud article, "Cell Phone Hang-Ups", 4) Students will form questions for each section. Questions will be recorded on marker board and on students' handouts, and 5) Homework/Assessment - Students complete article and graphic organizer.

The intent of this lesson was to introduce students to reading expository text in preparation for their independent research study. Within this unit student choice was limited to content. Michael carefully scripted the process, and broke it down for all students because he believed that it would make it more manageable for them.

The exchanges framed by this informational text literacy genre were carefully constructed as observed in a whole class lesson on developing outlines. In this particular lesson, Michael scripted each of the steps students would take as readers and writers to comprehend the text and show evidence of understanding. This included how to paraphrase non-fiction material and where the information belongs on the individual notecards students were expected to maintain.

While the written lesson plans suggested the same instruction for all

students, Michael scaffolded the process even further for the five struggling readers and writers, as seen in this exchange he had with Samantha during an independent literacy conference:

Samantha: I don't think I'm doing this right (looks down at blank page).

Michael: Look at the supporting detail, work backwards, and see if the example fits underneath the topic. Now anything that talks about that cause or effect goes as an example, OK? Do you see where you have that?

Samantha: Nods, and begins pulling out her note cards and starts to write.

Exchanges observed during Michael's work with informational text typically follow an IRF pattern (Wells, 1993). Michael used explicit oral and written directions to outline his expectations, students responded to specific questions designed to demonstrate their understanding, and then he offered verbal feedback. Michael used student examples and humor to keep students engaged. He generally followed up with the struggling students in small group sessions to clarify questions and review directions. Michael believed that these students would benefit from this because they are more likely to give voice to their confusion in the security of a small group.

Michael was not completely satisfied with his teaching practices during the Research unit. During several informal conversations, he expressed concerns that introducing students to the rules of research makes reading and writing a painful process for his students, particularly those who struggle. Michael's lesson plans included both a description of his instruction as well as typed reflections of his thoughts about these instructional plans. In one of these reflections, he wrote:

I think at this point in the research process my students may be beginning to dislike me. They wish that works cited pages and embedded citations and theses statements were not required, were not even real. But, unfortunately for them, they are all very real. And I do try to make this process as painless as possible, and my strategy for this is, no pampering. As however not fun and tedious as my students may see these elements of research I also use handouts to try to clarify, even simplify, these processes. It is very important to tackle one element of research at a time. Otherwise, you risk losing students and thus creating papers that are either plagiarized or lacking a central thesis.

Michael believed that offering a careful structure for the struggling students makes the process more pleasurable and the product attainable. "I'll actually start them [the struggling students] off. I'll actually write a

sentence with them and I'll sit down and sort of put the training wheels on but I won't do that for someone else." He described the Research unit as uncomfortable because he believed that it demanded a style of teaching that he could not easily accept.

Michael believed that effective instruction of struggling readers and writers begins with engaging material. He found that the narrative text offered the greatest opportunity to initiate engagement among the struggling students, subsequently facilitating effective instruction. During one of our initial interviews, Michael commented on the role of motivation in his instruction "If I can actually, or anybody can actually get them [struggling students] to go home and read that's awesome...That's a step in the right direction. So once you have that interest I think then you can move on." He believed the same is true for writing. Michael suggested that the writers' notebook provides a compelling outlet for student writing as he described later in the same interview:

The writers' notebook is just great because you're not being graded on the individual assignments...as far as sitting down and writing, you know, you're not handing it in for a quiz grade...you can't just start out with, alright, let's go write an essay, let's get those predicates. You know, get them interested, and then start saying we have to look at this and make sure this is correct.

The utility of the writers' notebook for Michael's students was observed during a lesson where Tina continued writing a short story in her notebook well into lunchtime because she had gotten what she called a "spark" during a brainstorming session. He believed that the struggling students were more motivated when they were given outlets to pursue reading and writing without the fear of judgment. Michael found narratives to offer a more flexible reading and writing experience. Yet, in practice, in order to facilitate this expression, he found that he needed to break down this freedom into smaller, attainable goals for these students.

Michael primarily used book clubs to support his students' investigation of narrative. He described his struggling students as having difficulty moving beyond literal comprehension as indicated by their responses to *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (1993) during a book club meeting:

They read it, and they have read it. And they will say he ran away, and they will say he got his bike on his ninth birthday, and they will say about the jacket, but as far as like thinking deep thoughts, not even deep thoughts, you know, just capturing the theme of the book and the author's message – it's just, um, you know I don't know if they are capable of it.

Michael reported that the use of book clubs invites conversation around texts which deepens students' comprehension. For the struggling student, Michael found this important because he is able to hear what they understand from the text and use the conversation with them to delve deeper. Michael found that the small groups were particularly helpful for his struggling students. Small grouping allowed him to keep careful track of their progress and these students, who do not always feel confident contributing to whole class conversations, were motivated to talk about their reading in these small group settings. Using texts that were at an appropriate reading level allowed Michael to invite these students to begin thinking critically about the text.

Michael described the exchanges within the book club as a conversation. He entered each meeting interested in learning about the students' experience with the text. Michael was more comfortable with this approach as students' learning was guided by what they knew, and there was not an explicit learning agenda for each meeting. This description is in line with Cazden's (2001) discussion of open exchanges. In reviewing lesson plans during a book club unit of study, Michael described the structure of instruction instead of the content he expected students to learn. This suggests that learning is interactive, and the student response to text initiates conversation and instructional turns. This is a distinct contrast to the IRF (Wells, 1993) model observed during the research unit where Michael had definitive expectations for student learning. As Michael moved through these units of study, he selected different pathways to motivate and engage learners.

## **The Dynamic Relationship between Michael's Beliefs and Practices**

Research on best practices across the grade levels describes the importance of motivating students' literacy development with engaging activities and resources in the hopes of supporting students' developing capacity to independently navigate literacy events (Block et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 2001; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson & Rodriguez, 2002). Michael reflected this practice in his discussion of his own beliefs about supporting struggling adolescent readers and writers during our many conversations throughout the study. Coupling motivating activities and resources has the potential to engage students in purposeful skill and strategy development, ultimately yielding independence over reading and writing events.

The terms, "motivation", "engagement", and "independence," have multiple representations (Guthrie, 1996, 2004). Is motivation defined by

the willingness to complete an assigned task or located in the desire to read and write for pleasure? Is engagement measured by a student's ability to perform on high-stake assessments or found in a student's interest in literacy events outside of curricular demands? Is independence realized when a student is able to move through curricular content with minimal support or represented in the ability to negotiate the multiple literacies within and outside of the classroom space? Understanding teaching as situated suggests there is not a definitive "answer" to these questions, instead differing, and at times, competing conceptions are linked to the context in which the students and teacher are positioned (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

### ***Competing Conceptions: What is at Stake?***

Michael spoke of the importance of "high expectations", "meeting students' needs," and building "independence." These are common phrases assigned to working with struggling students. The current climate offers competing conceptions of how these are actualized in classrooms (Alvermann, 2001; Bean & Brodhagen, 2001; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Guthrie, 2004; Lewis, 2001; NCLB, 2001; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). State and federal definitions of "expectations", "meeting students' needs" and "independence" are often quantified according to performance on high-stake tests (Afflerbach, 2005; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Johnston, 2004; NCLB, 2001). For Michael, however, it was more important to consider the struggling students' progress by charting their work in their reader's and writer's notebook, observing their interactions within book clubs, and understanding their evolution as writers by considering the multiple drafts the students' pieces went through across multiple genres. This view conceptualizes these terms of "expectations", "needs", and "independence" as situated within the specific contexts in which teaching and learning happens, suggesting these are facilitated and enacted differently across contexts (Alvermann, 2001; Barab & Plucker, 2002; Englert & Mariage, 1996; Engeström et al., 1999; Johnston 1999; Leander, 2002; Rohlfing, Rehm & Goecke, 2003; Wertsch et al., 1984).

Michael believed that it was important that the struggling students develop independence over their literacy practices which was realized when the students began to value reading and writing as both purposeful and pleasurable, seeking opportunities to engage in literacy practices on their own. Michael described the demands of using email and understanding web information. He framed the successful attainment of the goal of independence around literacy events that resist quantification. Yet, for middle school students who are struggling to succeed, this success

is typically quantified by external, high stakes tests (Street, 1995; Tolman, 1999; Williams, 2001). Michael stated that many of his struggling students have received low scores on these assessments and while he is confident that his approach will help them both become successful readers and writers he recognizes that there are many who feel a sense of urgency to continually rehearse assessment passages and practices in an effort to ensure test success for students. Michael's motivation to help students improve scores often results in teaching events that do not help students become motivated and independent readers and writers, a finding that has been shown in previous research (Afflerbach, 2005; Johnston, 2004; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). There is research that suggests that struggling students are more likely to seek out literacy events for pleasure when they can identify the utility of the literacy practice (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Dole et al., 1996; Jacobsen et al., 2002; Williams, 2001). This finding is consistent with other research on effective middle school literacy instruction that identifies strategies for motivating adolescents to recognize literacy as purposeful and pleasurable (Alvermann, 2001; Atwell, 1997; Bean & Brodhagen, 2001; Daniels, 2002, Harmon, 2002; Ivey, 2002; Ruddell, 1995). A consistent theme across this research is that adolescents find literacy events engaging when they are able to locate the event's relevance.

### ***Embodiment of Beliefs: Construction of Learning Structures***

Michael adopted a neo - Vygotskian approach to learning which often positioned the struggling students with more able peers. Research suggests that both the struggling students and their more capable peers progress as readers and writers when put in situations where the more advanced student "tutors" the less proficient (McCaslin, Bozack, Napoleon, Thomas, Vasquez & Wayman, 2006). This was true in his classroom as well. When positioning a struggling student with a more capable peer either in partnerships or in small groups, he was not called on as frequently as when the struggling students were grouped homogeneously or were working independently. Michael believed that this was a step towards independence.

This "motivated dependence" manifested itself more explicitly in those units of study that invited increased student choice over process and product. When Michael was moving through the carefully structured research unit, where student choice was limited to the topic of study, the struggling students were successfully moving through the tasks. The configuration of the unit invited frequent conferencing during both the gathering of information as well as its written representation, and the struggling students welcomed this focused interaction. When he moved

into narrative, which was a less structured but more student directed unit of study, the struggling students manifested their resistance to this freedom through misbehavior and/or engaging in tasks that made them “look busy.” Michael accommodated this shift by reconfiguring the peer groups to position his more able students to do essentially the same task. This practice was not unusual. The research literature on working with struggling readers and writers suggests that these students perform well when tasks are clearly delineated (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Dole et al., 1996; Jacobsen et al., 2002; Williams, 2001). This raises a larger question about working with struggling students. Is the indicator of “successfully motivating struggling readers and writers” the ability to move these students through specific tasks or is there a larger goal of building independence beyond curricular requirements?

The evidence suggests that Michael effectively motivated these students to complete curricular tasks. According to him, these students now were able to write a research paper, read and write specific poems, and read and develop narrative texts. Michael cited a general increase in these students’ standardized test scores at the conclusion of the year, indicating that they were progressing according to systemic standards as well. What is unclear, however, were whether these students were motivated and/or equipped to apply these skills observed in specific literacy events outside the classroom space.

### *Linguistic Orientation of the Exchanges*

Research on the linguistic positioning of classroom conversation suggests the “Initiation – Response – Evaluation” (IRE) model dominates 70% of teacher and student interactions in observed lessons (Cazden, 2001). Wells (1993, 2001) offered a restructuring of this model, replacing “evaluation” with “follow up” or “feedback.” Wells’ model suggests that the learning doesn’t end with teacher response but is brought back to the student through his/her feedback. During the time Michael was working exclusively with the struggling students, he was coded as directing the instructional conversation with students 78.3% of the time, although it was difficult to separate the exchanges between Michael and the struggling students and the general classroom population. In his classroom, the direction was found within the grouping structures he created. Michael facilitated the whole class in a variety of structures, either whole group or collaborative heterogeneous groups, and rarely engaged exclusively with the struggling student; Instead he made purposeful structural choices, such as forming groups and changing the physical position of these students to facilitate their instruction.



Michael believed that effective instruction for struggling middle school readers and writers requires situating motivating content within carefully cultivated relationships between teacher and student and among students in the class. In working to create this “safe” climate, these students came to respect their teacher. They believed that Mr. C had the “answers” and did not seem to trust themselves enough to attempt literacy events independently. Michael was dissatisfied with the model that was allowing his struggling students to succeed on curricular tasks, but also did not show evidence of the “passion” with literacy he hoped to inspire.

### ***Situating Systems***

There are multiple activity systems (Engeström et al., 1999) situating Michael and his students. Michael believed the Highpoint Regional Middle School supported his work with struggling students. There is evidence to corroborate this belief. The building principal, middle school language arts supervisor, and district language arts supervisor were well acquainted with the curriculum and spoke about Michael’s ability to understand the individual needs of his students and connect the curricular content in a way that supported these range of needs. They spoke of his avid interest in young adult literature and his genuine passion for helping his students connect to texts he was always bringing into the classroom library. In turn, Michael felt encouraged by these individuals. While he mentioned “still waiting” for books ordered to come in, he generally believed that he had the material resources necessary for working with struggling readers and writers, and enjoyed the addition of a support teacher for half of the class period. Weekly meetings with a guidance counselor provided Michael the opportunity to discuss students who were having academic and social struggles, and the counselor reached out to these students’ families, bridging the relationship between the teachers, students and larger familial support system.

The importance of understanding classrooms as situated within activity systems is supported by the larger sociocultural framework (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Englert & Mariage, 1996; Finders, 1997; Hendris, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Minick, 1985). The translation of this theoretical assertion to research on middle school language arts instruction, however, is limited. The consideration of these systems situates teaching and learning as context specific.

### **Implications for Practice**

Michael’s work with the struggling readers and writers included (a) reading and writing strategies taught through a variety of genres, (b)



explicit scaffolding of literacy events, (c) tightly controlled exchanges with struggling students, (d) infusing a variety of grouping structures into the struggling students' instruction, (e) explicit management systems, and (f) the ability to navigate and/or manipulate external systems to better support these students. It is tempting to offer this as a "recipe" of effective instruction in working with struggling middle school readers and writers. This would minimize, however, the depth of Michael's teaching story.

The relationship between Michael's beliefs and practices is dynamic. His beliefs shifted in response to what he observed during practice and, at times, his practices prompted him to reconsider beliefs. The sociocultural framework informing this study suggests that teacher beliefs and practices need to be understood as situated within specific contexts. Central to this dynamic are competing conceptions of student success. Are struggling students successful when they complete a prescribed literacy task, or is success measured by their ability to independently navigate literacy events? This is a tension that surfaces and is highlighted by policy initiatives that position student success as task oriented (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; NCLB, 2001).

Adolescence has long been recognized as a unique developmental juncture for children. This bridge towards adult independence is often marked by insecurity (Bean & Broadhagen, 2001; Hynds, 1997; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Juvonen et al., 2004). According to the research, it is not uncommon for adolescents to look for stable relationships with teachers to anchor this uncertainty (Harmon, 2002; Juvonen et al., 2004). Adolescents who struggle with reading and writing are open to even greater insecurities. Unlike students in the primary grades, students identified as struggling in seventh grade have likely been facing these obstacles for many years. Defined by frequent failures, these students are reticent to accept responsibility for literacy events (Alvermann, 2001; Gaffney, Methven, & Bagdasarian, 2002; Jacobsen et al., 2002).

Michael believed that Highpoint Regional School district played a supportive role in his work with the struggling students. The fact that he identified the value of systemic support suggests the wider systems situating teachers' work needs to be considered as well as indicated by previous researchers (Block et al., 2002; Ruddell, 1995).

Michael's beliefs about motivating independent readers and writers were located within larger systems that are more concerned with task completion, what Wells (2001) identified as "cultural reproduction," rather than independent thought and motivation. This perceived tension Michael felt between motivating students to complete curricular tasks and benchmark exams that did not always support the larger goal of developing

independent adolescent readers and writers, extends beyond the classroom. The current educational policy at the state and federal levels ties student progress and teacher quality to external assessments that are arguably more concerned with “cultural reproduction” than “individual development” (NCLB, 2001). The tensions that surface between Michael’s beliefs and practices raise important questions about the nature of universal literacy policies and point to the potential for future research.

## **Implications for Future Research**

Understanding Michael’s beliefs and practices as contextualized raises important questions for teachers who work with struggling middle school readers and writers. Research identifying best practices typically offers suggestions for teaching practice that does not consider the multiple activity systems situating teachers and students (Block et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 2001; Ruddell, 1995). This research is important, however, as it highlights the value of considering the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of literacy learning (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Johnston, 2005; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Morrow et al., 1999; Casey, 2009). It is important to consider how different classroom contexts influences the implementation of research based strategies (Lompsher, 1999; Wertsch et al., 1984).

This study is only a small step in beginning to understand the complexity of motivating middle school struggling readers and writers. Focusing on a single teacher allowed for an in-depth description of the relation between Michael’s beliefs and practices and invited greater exploration of the multiple activity systems situating teaching and learning. While the investigation of the tensions that emerged in this study raise questions about pedagogy and policy, further research that incorporates multiple methods is necessary.

Middle school students are unique. For them, the middle school years are a bridge between childhood and young adulthood. School is not just a place where learning happens. It is an environment where identity is shaped, independence is sought, and relationships develop (Juvonen et al., 2004). Middle school teachers are frequently asked to adapt research on elementary and high school literacy practices because of the lack of available information for middle grade instruction. Recent policy initiatives and reports are moving the federal and state microscopes to the middle grades (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Juvonen et al., 2004). This is a motivating significant shift in research on adolescent literacy. It is important that research adopts multiple designs (quantitative, qualitative, and those using mixed methods) to inform the field of adolescent literacy.

## **Limitation of the Study**

What this study offers in depth is limited in breadth. Considering the beliefs and practices of one middle school language arts teachers is only the beginning of the story. Research that pairs case studies with larger surveys of beliefs and practices of teachers who work within a diverse range of economic, social, and cultural settings will offer a more complete picture of how middle school teachers across multiple contexts support struggling readers and writers.

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## **Appendix A**

### Observation Coding System

\*The following is adapted from the work of Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Walpole (1999) and Taylor, Peterson, Pearson and Rodriguez (2002).

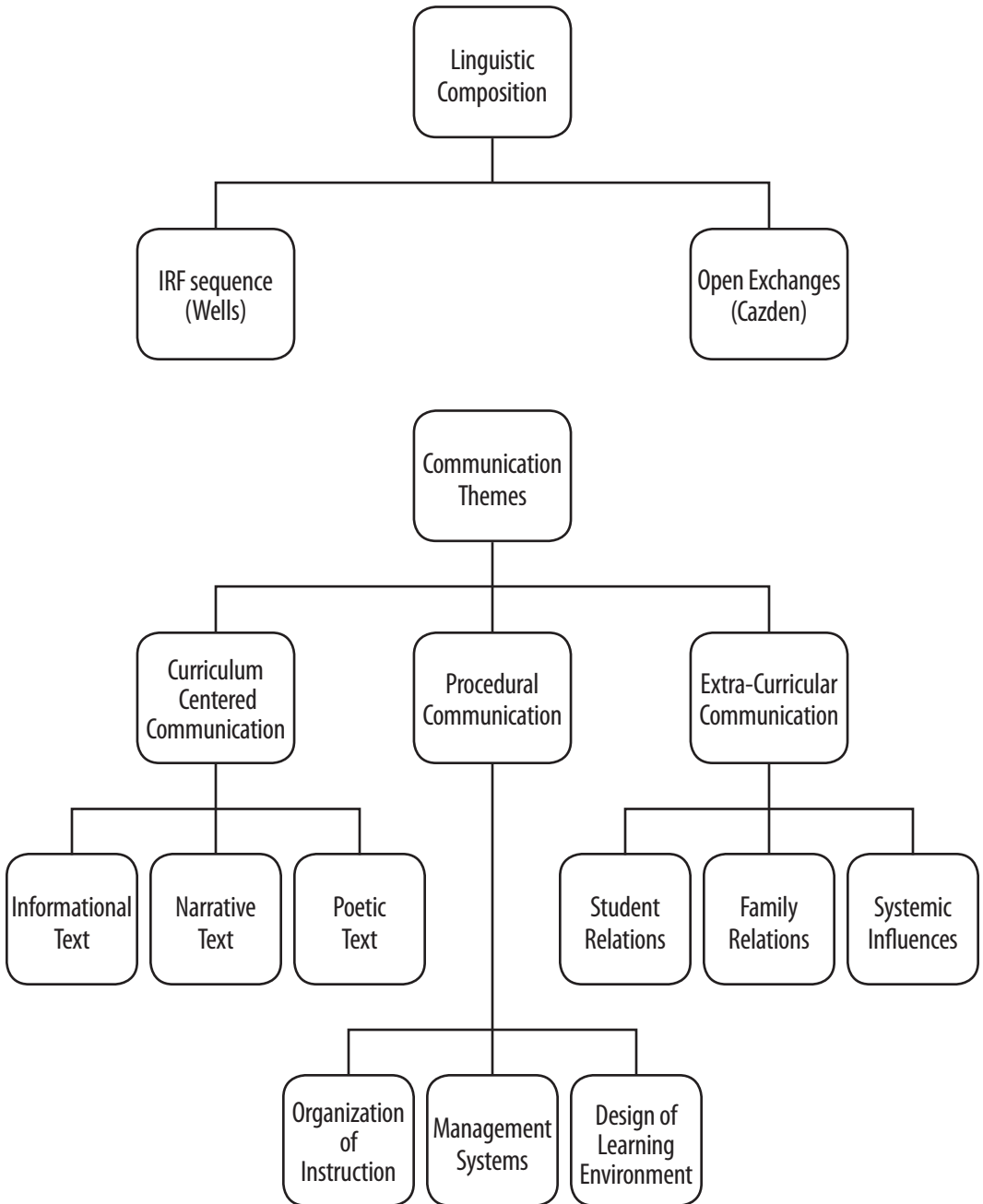
Every fifteen minutes during an observation I used one of these rubrics. They were typed on small labels and inserted within the researcher journal.

#### **TIME:**

- (a) the number of struggling students on- task \_\_\_\_\_**
- (b) position of struggling students \_\_\_\_\_**  
I – working independently  
HE- working in heterogeneous groups within the classroom  
HO-working homogenously with other struggling students  
TD – working with teacher directed activities  
LT – listening to teacher instruction  
LSR – listening to student(s) reporting
- (c) who is providing instruction \_\_\_\_\_**  
T – teacher  
S – student  
T/S – teacher and student together  
A – teacher aide  
N – no one
- (d) grouping patterns \_\_\_\_\_**  
W – whole class  
S/HE – small heterogeneous groups  
S/HO – small homogeneous groups  
P/HE – mixed ability partnerships  
P/HO – similar ability partnerships  
I – students working individually
- (e) literacy activities struggling students engaged in \_\_\_\_\_**  
R – reading  
W – writing  
S – speaking  
L – listening  
V/ML-viewing/media literacy
- (f) teacher interaction S/NS \_\_\_\_\_** (S=struggling student, NS=non struggling student)  
C/S – coaching/scaffolding (teacher supports child/children as he/she works)  
M/D – modeling/demonstrating (teacher shows how to perform a task)  
R – recitation (question/answer session)  
L – lecture (teacher presents information directly to students)  
D – discussion (teacher engages student(s) in an interactive conversation)

## Appendix B

Map of Coding Scheme





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## **Teaching the Teachers: How Adolescent Learners Explain Their Literacy Practices**

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*This article presents results from interviews with 26 adolescents (8th-12th grade) regarding their literacy perceptions and practices. The authors found that students were very specific about their purposes for reading and writing, but maintained separate purposes for reading and writing inside of school versus outside of school. Students' responses also showed that they used a variety of digital literacies, though they often separated these practices from their other literacy practices that included traditional text-based print. Finally, students were very specific about wanting more choice and freedom in their literacy assignments, though they tempered their responses with very definite requests for teacher help and assistance. While our findings echo some of the trends reported in the extant literature on adolescents' literacy practices, our findings also highlight certain contradictions in the literature. These contradictions emphasize the need for instruction that is responsive to knowing individual students.*

It is a confusing time to teach literacy to adolescents. Literature is full of contradictions about the preparedness of adolescents to meet the literacy demands of school and of society at large. Research also presents conflicting accounts of how best to offer instruction to adolescents. Part of the ongoing

debate regarding instruction is how much of a focus on adolescents' out of school literacies—especially their digital literacies—should be included in their in-school preparation. As researchers and teachers, we sought to better understand the differing views on adolescent preparedness and instruction and pursue the voices of adolescents in our own classrooms so that student voices could further our understanding of adolescent literacy. Specifically, we were guided by the following research questions:

1. *How do the adolescent students perceive their personal literacy, both in and out of school?*
2. *How do these students' perceptions of their literacy compare to the literacy perceptions of adolescents described in the literature?*
3. *What instructional implications do student voices offer us as teachers?*

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Literacy Levels among Adolescents***

The literature is replete with contradictions centering on how prepared today's adolescents are to perform in an adult world requiring increasingly complex literacy skills. On one side are the research and commentaries that show the decline of adolescent literacy skills. Two recent summative texts characterized the state of adolescent literacy: In *The Handbook of Reading Research on Comprehension* (Israel & Duffy, 2009) and *Literacy Instruction for Adolescents* (Wood & Blanton, 2009) the state of adolescent preparedness is given as, "Fewer than one-third of adolescents in the United States read proficiently" (Wharton-McDonald & Swiger, 2009, p. 510). Additionally, these authors reviewed studies suggesting that reading performance among 12th graders is declining and fewer than 5% of high school students are able to demonstrate complex thinking about text (Blanton & Wood, 2009; Wharton-McDonald & Swiger, 2009).

Contributing to these low academic levels is equally low engagement. The Program for International Assessment (PISA) showed that American teens placed 20th out of 32 countries on engagement in reading, one of the lowest placements of the primarily English speaking countries. Brozo, Shiel, and Topping (2007) examined the PISA results reporting that 69% of 12th graders did not read for enjoyment (with the most extreme nonreaders having already dropped out of school). Reading interest and engagement were then shown to be predictive of reading achievement:

Reading engagement is also important to the maintenance and further development of reading skills beyond the age of 15. . . Reading skills can deteriorate after the completion of initial education if they are not used. Engagement in reading is thus a predictor of learning success

throughout life (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007, p. 307).

Reading engagement as a predictor of achievement is more important than students' family background (consisting of parents' education and income). Students with high reading engagement but low parental education and income have higher reading achievement than students with lower reading engagement and the same background characteristics (Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001).

In contrast to the crises for adolescents' literacy levels portrayed earlier, some researchers suggest that our 21st century students are reading and writing more than any prior generation (Beers, Probst, & Rief, 2007; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Many middle and secondary students are confident in navigating multiple media--often at the same time--when the purpose suits (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003; Pitcher, et al., 2007). The multiple media that teens use are not exclusively digital media, but often include a majority of digital applications. Blogs, websites, online games, and social networks are all a part of what Williams (2005) called their vernacular literary practices. Today's students, referred to as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), may be video game geniuses, podcast producers, and pop culture experts who can text message without looking at the cell phone. We are reminded with increasing frequency that these digital natives often have complicated out-of-school literacies that include technologies we as teachers often do not understand (Alvermann, 2008). In sum, today's adolescents may be able to employ "multiple modalities in text production and consumption" (Vasudevan, 2008, p. 253) and learn at twitch speed (Culligan, 2003; Hull & Nelson, 2005).

### ***Effective Literacy Instruction for Adolescents***

The contrasting portrayals of adolescent literacy abilities are mirrored in the discussions about what is best for instruction. Some practitioners and researchers highlight general strategies that can be applied across a variety of texts (Massey & Heafner, 2004; Tovani, 2004). Other researchers (Conley, 2009; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) emphasize that each discipline (social studies, science, mathematics, English) has unique literacy needs that are not immediately transferable to other disciplines.

Still another instructional divide exists between what some view as the in-school vs. out-of-school divide in the literacy instruction of students. Those that report our students as being less prepared typically define literacy in traditional academic ways, using print texts. From this standpoint, instruction should prepare students for college and for participation in society. Within this position, many teachers still assume that students share their views of what makes up "real" reading and writing (Williams,

2005). Furthermore, there has been a refusal to acknowledge or accept students' out-of-school literacy practices because of the perception that they lack cognitive demand. Some authors go so far as to link adolescents' reported declining test scores to their practices of out-of-school literacies (Bauerlein, 2007). Instructionally, the call is given for a more "back-to-the-basics" approach to adolescent literacy, reading, and writing. In this article, we refer to this traditional view of literacy as in-school literacy, since this is how students are typically measured in an academic setting.

This traditional approach to literacy is countered with definitions of literacy that include everything that requires reading, writing, and sometimes listening. In this article, we refer to these as out-of-school literacies. We use this description to designate them as literacies that have not been accepted within the mainstream traditional ways of teaching and/or responding. For example, sending text messages and reading text messages would be considered literacy within this broad definition. These have been the components that have not been traditional in schools and are generally the digital means of reading and writing. It was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that researchers began to call for a reframing of the field of "content-area literacy" that would include students' out of school literacies (Stevens, 2002). Educators holding to this theoretical framework believe strongly that because students often find the private literacies so motivating (and often the in-school literacies so demotivating) that teachers should look at how the out-of-school literacies can become part of the accepted literacies within the classrooms (Alvermann, 2008; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Proponents of this view believe that by using students' knowledge about their out-of-school literacies, teachers can bridge the gap between what students already know and are interested in with what students are not as familiar with and in which they may lack interest (Alvermann, 2008). Alvermann based her argument for educators to embrace the out-of-school literacies of students on the foundation of engagement: "When school work is deemed relevant and worthwhile, when opportunities exist for students to reinvent themselves as competent earners, then literacy instruction is both possible and welcomed" (p. 18). However, such reformative instruction has been quicker to be described as theoretically possible in the research arena than to actually occur in the schools (Dreztnin & Maggio, 2008).

Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo (2004) proposed a third space—a middle ground between in- and out-of-school literacies. They believed that traditional classroom teaching often ignores students' funds of knowledge and perspectives; however, they also acknowledge that students need to be connected to conventional academic

texts and discourses. By building on students' funds of knowledge, teachers may very well be able to teach more of the traditional in-school literacies (Alvermann, 2008; Tierney, 2009). The practical ways in which this is enacted remain tantalizing, but unclear (Conley, 2009).

### ***Students' Voices***

What are often missing in these debates about what is best for adolescents are the students' voices. Two recent projects provide exceptions to the norm—the Pew Internet Life Project and the Digital Youth Project. These two initiatives gathered hundreds of interviews with adolescents. According to the Pew Internet project (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007), 60% of the teenagers in the study did not consider writing emails and instant messages, or texting to be “real” writing. They classified these activities as communication, not writing. While the report found that percentages of white, African American, and Hispanic students who wrote several times a week were similar, African American students were more likely to write in personal journals or write music and lyrics outside of school than other racial groups. The same study found students who enjoyed writing for personal reasons did not necessarily enjoy writing in school, although 67% of teens surveyed stated that they did enjoy their school writing some of the time.

The Digital Youth Project (Ito et al., 2008) focused exclusively on youth media usage. The Project findings included the importance of online media for extending social networks, friendships, and interests revealing that, “In both friendship-driven and interest-driven online activity, youth create and navigate new forms of expression and rules for social behavior. By exploring new interests, tinkering, and ‘messing around’ with new forms of media, they acquire various forms of technical and media literacy” (p. 2). This learning is often peer-mediated. Ito and colleagues suggested that such peer-based learning emerges from the youth's own interests, suggesting some new ways of thinking about the role of public education:

Rather than thinking of public education as a burden that schools must shoulder on their own, what would it mean to think of public education as a responsibility of a more distributed network of people and institutions? And rather than assuming that education is primarily about preparing for jobs and careers, what would it mean to think of education as a process of guiding kids' participation in public life more generally, a public life that includes social, recreational, and civic engagement? (p. 35)

The researchers of the Pew Internet project and the Digital Youth Project certainly suggest that students' in- and out-of-school literacies

provide the opportunities to learn strategies that are transferable to public/academic literacies. While the opportunities may exist, we still face certain dilemmas, such as HOW do learning strategies transfer from one arena to another (a notion challenged by researchers, (e.g., Conley, 2009; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), and do students even want their out-of-school literacies to become a part of their in-school literacies? This latter question continues to emphasize the lack of adolescent voice in much of the research on adolescent literacy. While the student voices are being expressed in certain ways regarding digital media, the same is not true for what they think about school-based traditional literacy.

## **Methodology**

### ***Context***

Dixie is a former classroom teacher, currently teaching at a university. Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel were part of various courses that Dixie taught and/or advisees who completed their master's theses under Dixie's supervision. Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel are all also high school and middle school teachers. Catherine is a 10th grade social studies teacher who teaches at a diversely-populated urban school; Julie is a special education teacher serving an urban school that offers services to students with low and high-incidence disabilities; Ben is a high school English teacher at a suburban, predominantly middle-class school; and Rachel was a high school English teacher at an suburban alternative high school at the time of this study (she has since moved to a middle school teaching position). That context brought each of us together based on our shared interests about adolescents. As part of our shared context, we entertained numerous conversations around the divisions mentioned in the literature. As we discussed the seeming contradictions in the literature and in context, we determined that we would learn about our own adolescent students and seek their voices to deepen our understanding.

### ***Participants***

Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel selected 4-8 of the students in their own classes whom they wished to understand in a deeper way. These selected students were of all achievement levels and seemed to be less transparent about their literacy practices than others in the class (See Appendix A for participant demographics). All student and school names are pseudonyms. It should be noted that we did not select students with the intention of creating a matched sample representing all achievement levels, grade levels, and ethnicities. Selections of the students were made based



on who we, as teachers, wanted to know in a deeper way. Interestingly, it was only after we compiled our student profiles that we discovered we had nearly equal representation of gender; high, medium and low achievers; as well as an exact division of students of color compared to Caucasian students. Our breakdown across grade-levels did not offer the same equal matches, based on the students that the Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel taught. In total, we had one eighth grader, four tenth graders, six eleventh graders, and four twelfth graders—one was even a 3rd year senior, with the rest being ninth graders. Based on this variation, we decided not to make comparisons based on grade level. There were 14 males and 12 females. Three of the students interviewed had special education individualized education plans (IEPs). Nine students spoke a language other than English as their first language. Of the 26 students, 5 were of Asian descent, 5 were Hispanic, 3 were African American, and 13 were Caucasian. Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel ranked students' achievement levels by considering their GPA, test scores, and overall participation: Six students were high achievers (averaging A grades), 10 students were ranked as average achievers (averaging B & C grades), and 10 students were low achievers (averaging Ds or Fs).

These students were then invited to answer interview questions (See Appendix B). In a few cases, students declined or had time conflicts and another student was sometimes substituted. In this way, our sampling was both purposeful and also convenient. Institutional Review Board protocol from the University was followed for the research. Our open-ended interview questions (See Appendix B) were created mostly by Dixie, but in collaboration with the other authors and with the caveat that the questions would be jumping-off places to start conversations. The expectation was certainly that follow-up questions would be asked. While we as authors were looking for information that addressed how students perceived themselves as readers, writers, and users of technology, along with what they would like to see in their classroom instruction, we wanted to leave the questions open to broad interpretation by the students, especially initially. In almost all cases, Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel conducted the interviews during a single sitting (usually lasting around 45 minutes with each student. If clarifications were needed about a response, Catherine, Julie, Ben, and Rachel returned to the student to ask additional follow-up questions.

### ***Data Sources and Analysis***

Data sources were the transcripts of interviews conducted with 26 students. In order to answer the first research question (*How do our*

*adolescent students perceive their personal literacy, both in and out of school?*), we wanted to provide rich descriptions of the students as we tried to capture their perceptions and understand the constraints of the context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). We strengthened our study through investigator triangulation with our ongoing, analytic conversations that occurred during and after our implementation of this research.

Dixie, Julie, and Ben read all of the transcripts multiple times. In our first phase of analysis, *independent coding*, we each coded our data separately, writing analytical and methodological memos on the data sources (Patton, 1990). Codes were derived from phrases and sentences of actual students' comments. In the second phase of analysis, *independent, initial category creation*, we used our memos independently to discover the potential categories that emerged from the data. In the third phase of analysis, analytic conversation and category convergence, Dixie, Ben, and Julie met and began to compile our three separate lists of categories. We created a master list that included all of the categories each of us identified, finding that our initial list included many of the same categories. We considered an item to be a category if it was evident in a majority of student transcripts (14 or more). Our master list included five categories. As we discussed each category, we identified codes that we included within each category. Further, we developed guiding questions to lead our re-analysis of the data. In the fourth phase of analysis, *category confirmation*, each of us revisited the student transcripts to confirm categorical examples and comments. The five categories that we used were:

1. Reading/writing for specific purposes: Why do students read and write? Does their purpose for in school reading and writing vary from out of school reading and writing? If so, how?
2. Digital literacy: How do students use digital literacy?
3. Student choice: When do students make choices and what choices do they want in reading and writing?
4. Relationships: What is the importance of student/teacher relationships in motivating students to read and write?
5. Strategy use: What strategies do students use when reading and writing?

In the fifth stage of analysis, *final category confirmation*, Dixie, Julie, and Ben met a second time and listed student quotes that we identified as fitting each category. At this point, we determined that we did not have enough student examples in the final two categories—relationships and strategy use. While these categories remained interesting to us in our

ongoing conversations, we opted not to include them because they were not evidenced by 14 or more students in our sample. For the remaining three categories, we found that we (Dixie, Julie, and Ben) (a) had identified a majority of students evidencing that category and (b) each of us had a high degree of agreement about specific quotations that supported the category. Overall, we found 85% inter-rater reliability. Discrepancies were resolved through conversation and clarification. In the final phase of analysis, *informal audits*, authors Rachel and Catherine reviewed our data analysis and category formations. They offered clarifying questions and comments, but no categories or examples were changed.

Once this process was completed for the first research question, we turned our attention to examining the second research question: *How do our students' perceptions of their literacy compare to the literacy perceptions of adolescents described in the literature?* We conducted a careful review of the literature based on the three themes established in answer to the first research question. Those themes (and the third research question, *What instructional implications do student voices offer us as teachers?*) were addressed through a careful review of the literature and by comparing our three categories (reading/writing for specific purposes, digital literacy, and student choice) with the extant literature. Finally, to address our third research question, we looked specifically at our interview question to the students that asked them to identify what teachers could do to improve instruction. From this, as well as from our review of the literature, we found several recommendations for our own instruction.

## Results and Discussion

### **Research Question 1: How do our adolescent students perceive their personal literacy, both in and out of school?**

From our data analysis of student transcripts, we determined three broad themes about students' literacy practices. First, students reported very specific reasons for reading and writing, both in school and out of school. As an extension and clarification of the first theme, the second theme offered insight into some of those purposes for reading and writing—their usage of digital literacy. Finally, students asked for greater autonomy to determine their own reading and writing practices (See Appendix C).

#### ***Theme 1: Reading and writing for specific purposes***

Students were very purposeful about their reading and writing. They could describe specific situations when they read and wrote, and specific situations when they chose not to read and write. Within this broad theme, four subthemes detailed students' purposes for reading and writing. Most

often, students read and wrote to complete assignments (81%), followed by reading and writing for emotional reasons (58%), reading and writing for entertainment reasons (42%), and reading for knowledge (27%). The final subtheme included reading only, not reading and writing, since no students mentioned writing to gain knowledge.

*Subtheme A: Reading and Writing to Complete Assignments.* Out of 26 students, 81% described reading and writing for the purpose of completing an assignment. In short, they read and wrote because a teacher assigned them to read and write. As Terrell stated, “No matter what, I write. I do because I need the grade . . . . So I write what all that a teacher gives me.” Four students specified that they read and wrote to get a better grade. For example, Gary responded, “If I read, it helps my test scores and I have school success.”

Within completing an assignment, seven (77%) of the English Language Learners (ELLs) focused on vocabulary improvement as their main purpose for completing reading and writing assignments. Evan stated, “I like to read because I know that it helps me to write and even read better. Reading builds up my vocabulary and it will help me write reports and have a better sense in writing and reading.” Manuel responded, “I read to expand my vocabulary--that way I learn more words.”

Students adopted a utilitarian attitude towards assignments. They recognized that if they completed assignments, they got better grades, learned vocabulary, or gained respect from the teacher. It was rare for students to mention enjoyment of assigned reading or writing. However, enjoyment and interest in assignments were not completely absent. Tri said, “Sometimes I just like reading because it’s interesting to me like the book, *Night*, and how it talks about Elie and what he goes through at the concentration camp. Other books like *Black Boy* or *Forged by Fire*, I like reading them because I learn from it.” Similarly, Ava said, “For me to like the book it has to be a really interesting book. Like, for example, when I read *Forged by Fire* that was a really good book and I finished it in two days. I got my book talk in the next day.” Four students cited specific titles of assigned books that they described as “interesting” or “enjoyable.” What “interested” students seemed to be when they could connect personally to some piece of the story, whether trials, isolation, depression, or peer pressure. Writing for school purposes was not enjoyed, except by one student who was able to take journalism as an elective.

*Subtheme B: Reading and Writing to Process Emotions.* Reading and writing were used by 58% of the students to process emotions. Mark stated, “Reading is something I do all the time no matter what . . . I love to read because it helps me to get away from the problems of my every day

life.” Amy, a talented girl who was in danger of failing because of truancy explained why she liked to read: “When you have an unstable, stressful life, words seem to be something I was always able to rely on.”

Writing was more dominant as a way to process emotions (54%) than was reading (27%). Latisha summarized by saying, “Writing is my passion, if I had one. I love to write. Writing is a beautiful way to express your feelings and knowledge. I write poetry. . . . I do it as a release therapy type of thing.” Tisha, a high-achieving student stated, “My life has been a bubble of problems. Writing helps me. Writing is basically my best friend.”

Gender differences were very distinct within this subtheme. While only 36% of the boys used reading and writing to process emotions, 100% of the girls used reading and/or writing for this purpose. Processing emotions was a critical purpose for the girls’ literacy practices. Additionally, students of color and ELLs were more likely than Caucasian students or non-ELLs to refer to reading and writing as a way to process emotions.

It was interesting to consider what types of texts students read and wrote to help them process emotions. When specific examples were given, students most often referenced reading fiction texts and writing poetry as ways to do so. Gender differences again showed in text types. Without exception, girls referenced fiction, while boys referenced nonfiction as the genre they linked to reading to process emotions. Both genders referenced writing poetry most often as the way they wrote to process emotions.

*Subtheme C: Reading and Writing for Entertainment.* Gary’s responses were indicative of those who read or wrote for entertainment value (42%):

I read baseball magazines and Sports Illustrated or sports pages . . . I also get a lot of skateboarding magazines. I love baseball so I try and read about the Mariners as much as I can. I read Facebook all the time. I also like interesting articles about people, usually musicians.

In general, students were more likely to read than to write for entertainment. Males (50%) were more likely than females (33%) to read and/or write for entertainment purposes.

When it came to what they read and wrote to entertain themselves, the students referenced reading either social networking sites, other websites, or magazines and writing on social networking sites. Reading for entertainment offered a certain discrepancy. Traditional print materials made up all of what students described when reading to gain knowledge or to process emotions, but when it came to entertainment, students were more likely to reference websites. Two boys (8% overall) described writing for entertainment purposes. Mason told us, “I write this stuff because . . . it is a good use to kill time.” Jason’s writing was

done to see what was happening with his friends.

The percentages of low achievers using reading and writing for entertainment purposes provided interesting contrasts to the average and high achievers. Of the low achievers, 50% used reading and writing for entertainment purposes, while 40% of the average achievers used reading and writing for entertainment purposes and only 33% of the high achievers used reading and writing for entertainment purposes. Low achievers were the only ones to suggest writing for entertainment purposes.

*Subtheme D: Reading to Gain Knowledge.* As previously mentioned, students did not mention writing to gain knowledge. While students expressly talked about bettering their vocabulary as an academic reason to read, they described gaining intelligence and knowledge as part of why the students read outside of school (27%). We asked two separate questions: (1) *What do you read because you have to?* and (2) *What do you read because you want to?* We then probed for why they read certain things. Just as the ELLs were the majority of respondents who listed gaining vocabulary as a reason to read for school, the ELLs were overwhelmingly the ones who read to gain knowledge and intelligence. Peter was the only exception when he said that he read to learn new things. Fifty-six percent of the ELLs in our study described the importance of reading to learn. Ki said, “I like to read because [I’d] rather spend my time learning new things than learning things I already know,” while Jaqueline stated that she read to feel more intelligent.

## ***Theme 2: Digital literacy***

Just as in the previous theme, the overwhelming majority of students (96%) used some type of technology that included reading and writing. Students expressed two purposes for using digital media. The primary reason for all groups was to communicate (65%). Ki expanded the idea of connecting with others by stating, “MySpace and blogs helps me express my feelings to my friends because it is easier to tell your friends your feelings. I also use text messaging to tell another person without telling them directly.” The second purpose they mentioned was for entertainment purposes (27%)—to “see what was going on” or “catch up on the celebrity drama.”

Some particular groups’ percentages were much higher than the overall numbers and are worth examining more closely. Females referenced using some type of digital media to communicate 83% of the time, as opposed to the 50% that males referenced when using digital media to communicate. Average achievers were most likely to use digital media to communicate (90%), as opposed to 50% of the high achievers and 50% of the low achievers. All three of the students who were categorized as special education students

in literacy described using digital media to communicate.

Student responses told us quite a bit about what types of technology they used. Forty-six percent of the students referenced using email; 69% of the students used MySpace or Facebook (none noted using both); 8% of the students wrote their own and read other friends' blogs; 54% referenced text and/or instant messaging; 19% referred to reading other things such as news (rather than social networking pages or blogs) on the Internet; and one student mentioned gaming and reading the guides for gaming. Girls were twice as likely to use email compared to boys (8 girls, 4 boys). As we examined student responses for why they chose the particular media that they did, we noted that students frequently used the concept of "speed." Students wanted fast and immediate access to friends. This was the reason many gave for using text messages rather than email. Emailing was reserved for distant family or "formal" occasions, as Peter stated.

The single exception to using digital literacy was John, a student who was terminally ill. John told us that he did not use the computer unless he was forced to for school; he did not have a computer at home; and he did not own a cell phone. Certainly, John was the exception in many ways.

The students seemed divided about whether or not they considered the digital literacies to be part of reading and writing. Paul commented, "I write to stay connected—email, notes, MySpace." His reference clearly indicated that he viewed this as writing. In contrast, Tisha mentioned nothing about reading or writing when asked what she read and wrote outside of school. Julie probed further, asking specifically about social networking pages and email. Tisha responded, "Oh Ms. Learned, that's not real writing; that's just chatting."

Students of both genders, all ethnic groups, and all achievement levels used digital literacies. As researchers and teachers, the numbers of users of digital literacies did not surprise us. Nor did it surprise us that these students separated what they read or wrote through digital means from the more traditional print-based reading and writing. However, one distinguishing factor that emerged was the **frequency** of usage. We realized that simply examining who used the technologies and why they used those technologies was not enough. While 96% of the students used digital literacy, the frequency of use varied widely. Some students described nearly constant use of multiple technologies. One such user was Gary, a low achieving white male in the 11th grade who said, "I text at least 50 times a day. I use Facebook all the time." Paul, an average-achieving 8th grader told us, "We only have one computer for four of us, but I use that a lot. It is also our DVD player, so there isn't much time for Internet if someone is watching a movie. I do MySpace and I do IM



[instant message] some, but it just wastes time.”

On the other end of the usage spectrum were those students who referenced a single technology and only limited use. Latisha, a high-achieving African American female in the 9th grade wrote, “I myself am not too big on MySpace. I don’t go as often as others. I just use it as a quick way to communicate.” Jose, a Hispanic male in the 10th grade, qualified for special education services in reading, writing, and math. Jose said that he did not text or email, but he did have a MySpace page that he checked almost daily. Devon, an African American male in the 9th grade also received special education services in reading and writing. He also had no email, but did have a MySpace page. He checked this infrequently, maybe twice a week, and then reported that he stayed on the computer for about five minutes. Mark was another infrequent user. When asked why, he stated, “I think I use it less because I don’t see the need to have technology at every corner I go to because there are simpler things in life you can enjoy without being in front of a computer screen.”

### ***Theme 3: Choice***

This theme varied from the other two. The previous two themes were descriptive of how and why students read and wrote. The theme of choice emerged as what students wanted in school reading and writing. Not surprisingly, students wanted choice (77%): Sixty-two percent of the students specifically mentioned wanting to be able to choose reading materials, and 62% wanted more choice when it came to writing topics and genres. (Though the percentages of choice in reading and choice in writing are the same, they represent different students.) Some students wanted more choice because they felt they had read the same things repeatedly. Paul suggested, “We should get to read about other topics—like in state history, we always read about the European settlers and the Russians, we don’t ever read about Native Americans. That would be more fun. We should read a wider depth.”

Students wanted choice in their writing topics and formats for the same reasons they wanted freedom in reading. Students frequently linked choice with creativity in writing. The more freedom they were given to choose what to write about and how to write it, the more likely they were to enjoy the writing process and be more creative with their writing. “Stop restricting it to certain formulas,” John mentioned, going on to say that teachers often instruct students to follow formulas without also showing them or encouraging them to break free from these structures.

Students were not opposed to teachers providing some structure. Lynn told us, “I believe teachers should make assignments/projects where the



student must choose a book of their liking that follows certain rules such as it must be a certain length and reading level.” One student suggested setting a number of pages to be read and allowing students to read from a variety of books to meet that page number goal.

Students also wanted guidance from teachers. Ava said, “Teachers should help [students] choose the right book that fits them so they can enjoy reading more.” Tri said, “Teachers should introduce books to kids so that they can find what they are interested in.” Mark’s response echoed Tri’s response: “Help [students] find the things they are interested in life. Don’t just [throw] a book in their face and say [here] read this. Give them the benefit of a doubt and ask what they like.”

The notion of help from teachers was tied closely to students’ requests that teachers take the time to know students personally and consider their likes and dislikes. Students recognized that this should take time, but they wanted that time for interaction with the teacher. Tiffany used the word “space” to show that sometimes what is needed is protected classroom time to sit, read, write, and think.

One particular subgroup’s numbers provided a poignant reminder of how far we still have to go in effective pedagogy. Eighty-five percent of the students of color wanted choice, higher than the 69% of white students who wanted choices in reading and writing. The margin between students of color and white students was even higher when examining those who wanted choices in writing, with 46% of white students wanting more choice in writing, and 77% of minority students wanting choice in writing.

We recognize the limitations to our results. We used a relatively small sample of students. In particular, our subgroups were very small for comparative purposes. However, we see this as one piece of a much larger and ongoing conversation about adolescent literacy habits and instruction that can value those habits.

**Research Question 2: How do our students’ perceptions of their literacy compare to the literacy perceptions of adolescents described in the literature?**

We began our study by examining the dichotomies presented in the literature about adolescent literacy. We expected to find similar divisions reported from our students, but in order to investigate our research question, we carefully examined our themes while reviewing existing literature for similar ideas. What we found both confirmed our expectations and surprised us. One finding that confirmed what we suspected was in the area of engagement. Our students confirmed that they do not read or write for learning or enjoyment when teachers assigned literacy tasks; they

read and write for the grade. If reading for interest and engagement is an indicator of school success (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007/2008)), then it is problematic that students are not reading to learn or to enjoy texts. Second, students' out of school literacies were most often digital and they used those digital literacies to communicate and stay connected to others. Our students often did not view these out-of-school, digital literacies as "real" reading and writing, nor did they see the skills they used in these literacies as contributing to the skills they needed for in-school literacies. This confirmed the reports from the Pew Internet project (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007) and in essence, underlined the divide between in-school and out-of-school literacies.

There were also findings that surprised us. These findings offered strong reminders that we must not assume that the students we teach match what we see reported in the literature. As teachers, we must learn about our own students rather than relying on what others have said. First, while the research has reported that adolescents use out-of-school, digital literacies as a way of staying connected, we found that staying connected was a recurring point made across each of the three themes. Students wanted to connect to their reading and writing in school. They believed that this connection could be facilitated through greater choice in their assignments in school and through teachers knowing more about what interested them. While students created their own connections via out of school literacies, they wanted and were willing for teachers to help create connections with others and with characters in texts. Shannon, a high achiever, stated, "These are books that affect you mentally. Teachers should keep that in mind when they interact with the class. If you treat your students like a bunch of idiots, you are going to get a classroom full of idiots who [may] have an emotional connection with Holden Caulfield but will never know it!"

A second surprise in our results was the frequency of digital literacy use. Current literature often gives the impression that all adolescents are digital natives who are adept, if not addicted, to technology such as cell phones and the Internet and that they use this technology to read and write a variety of things. Our students who used digital media showed a wide range of variance—from those who interacted with some kind of technology for several hours a day to those who used the same technologies for minutes every week. What has been neglected in previous research is the frequency of technology use, potentially leading to false implications of the research. While youth report using online communications more than ever (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007), what these reports do not fully capture is the extent of that use.

Equally surprising to us was that not a single student referenced

wanting more technology to be used in school. As teachers, we need to be cautious not to automatically view integrating more digital literacies into the classroom as a silver bullet for students' motivation and literacy achievement. Though most students used digital media, they were not all proficient at using it. We theorized that this might have been a function of socioeconomic status within our sample, though we acknowledge that we did not look at this variable specifically and that this was not the case for each student who showed less-frequent usage of digital media. If we do bring digital literacies into the classroom, we need to expect a range of familiarity and acceptance of the process. Additionally, the range of digital media use provides an opportunity, perhaps even a responsibility, for teachers to make sure that we do integrate some instruction that includes using a broad range of digital media so that our students begin the process of becoming efficient and thoughtful consumers, readers, and writers of digital literacies. Richardson (2009) challenged teachers to reconsider how to use digital media in the classroom. He contended that by omitting such things as blogs and wikis, we simply assign students to repeat work that has already been done instead of finding and evaluating the information already available on a topic.

A final surprise came as we examined the theme of choice. In each of the subcategories, students wanted more choice in reading and writing, with average-achieving students and white students being the exceptions. We recognize the need for caution in interpreting these trends in our data. However, it does lead us to question if the white students may be finding more in both traditional reading and writing assignments that mirror their experiences. The percentage of minority students who wanted choice in reading and writing was higher than the percentage of white students, which offers further support to the idea that we continue to marginalize our minority students with books and writing assignments in which they can find very little shared experience. Brenner, Pearson and Rief (2007) reminded us, "Good teachers . . . know enough about those kids to suggest ideas for writing and books they might be interested in reading" (p. 263). Some of our students offered one possible explanation for wanting increased choice. Tri commented that "teachers should give kids more time for reading in school." Tiffany described it as allowing students "space" to read. With greater choice, particularly in reading, they felt they might be more engaged and/or better able to finish the material. Without the time and space to read and think in school, the outcome described by Jason, an ELL student, may be true for many students:

Over time, I started to dislike reading because school pushed too much extra work with the reading. I used to enjoy reading in the past more

than [sic] I do now because I read for fun and didn't have to worry about filling out worksheets about what I read. Now I only read when required to.

English language learners (ELLs) and at-risk readers, in particular, may need even more time for reading, writing, and processing (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Cohen, 2007; Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Lewis & Moorman, 2007; Wilhelm, 2001).

Much of the previous research has focused primarily on students' in-school or out-of-school literacies, with instruction being suggested from the same divisive frameworks. In this study, we wanted to examine a broader scope to see how all of the variations affected students' literacy habits and needs. We wanted to think more deeply about what effective literacy instruction should include. Ultimately, we were left with a strong need for caution and further research, balanced with some encouragement for what we as teachers do.

## **Implications for Teaching**

### **Research Question 3: What instructional implications do student voices offer us as teachers?**

First, our examination of the literature left us with the need for caution when thinking about how our instruction might include building on out-of-school literacies. Some make the argument that students' out-of-school literacies can inform and enhance their in-school literacies and vice versa (Alvermann, 2008). In order for this to occur, we as teachers and researchers must verify that students can and do transfer literacy skills between media and disciplines. This is not a generally accepted fact, particularly in the newest arguments (e.g. Conley, 2009; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2007). Instead, what emerging research suggests is that students (and teachers) are not automatically flexible in their applications of literacy knowledge and that each discipline requires a unique set of skills and strategies. If this is true, our students might know how to read, summarize, and evaluate information on a social networking site and still not be able to apply those same thinking processes to a traditional history textbook. We found no evidence from the participants in our research that they were able to transfer literacy strategies between disciplines or between in- and out-of-school literacies.

At the same time, we were encouraged. Students did not use digital literacies to the exclusion of traditional literacies, nor did they ever say that they wanted teachers to use or value digital literacies more in school. These students reminded us that the role of the teacher in in-school literacies is critical. Shannon commented:

One thing a teacher should do to heighten student interests is to be interested in the book themselves. Just handing out worksheets that are most likely five years old and from another teacher, and giving some historical background is not reassuring. We want someone who is psyched!

Additionally, as the entire themes of Purposes for Reading and Writing and Student Choice reminded us, teachers can do a great deal to encourage student interest in reading and writing by valuing students' purposes for literacy and by offering students multiple opportunities for making even small choices. Our students did not describe this choice as a choice between in- and out-of-school literacies; instead, it was choice about topics, books, and formats. Much of our students' attitudes toward reading and writing a variety of text types depended on what the teacher did to facilitate connection to the text, either through enthusiasm for the assignment and/or book, through group work, by offering choices, or a combination. Further, students were willing to make connections with traditional texts and through traditional writing. Again, the students emphasized the teachers' knowledge of their interests more than the format of the text, proving that what teacher knows about the subject that she teaches is only as powerful as what the teacher knows about the students whom she teaches.

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## Appendix A

### Participant Demographics

Student	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade	Teacher	Achievement Level	Special Services
1	Female	Caucasian	11th	Ben	Average	
2	Male	Caucasian	8th	Ben	Average	
3	Male	Vietnamese	9th	Catherine	Average	ESL
4	Male	Caucasian	9th	Catherine	Average	
5	Male	Vietnamese	9th	Catherine	Average	ESL
6	Male	African American	9th	Catherine	Low	
7	Female	Caucasian	11th	Ben (Hazen)	High	
8	Female	African American	9th	Catherine	High	
9	Male	Caucasian	11th	Ben	Low	
10	Male	Chinese	9th	Catherine	High	ESL
11	Male	Filipino	9th	Catherine	High	ESL
12	Male	Caucasian	9th	Catherine	High	
13	Female	Vietnamese	9th	Catherine	Low	ESL
14	Male	Vietnamese	9th	Catherine	Low	ESL
15	Female	Hispanic	10th	Julie	High	ESL
16	Female	Caucasian	10th	Julie	Average	
17	Male	Hispanic	10th	Julie	Low	ELL; SPED in reading, writing, and math.
18	Male	African American	9th	Julie	Low	SPED in reading, math, and writing
19	Female	Hispanic	11th	Rachel	Average	ESL
20	Male	Caucasian	11th	Rachel	Average	
21	Male	Caucasian	10th	Rachel	Low	
22	Female	Caucasian	11th	Rachel	Low	
23	Female	Caucasian	12th	Rachel	Low	SPED in math
24	Female	Caucasian	12-3rd yr. senior	Rachel	Low	
25	Female	Hispanic	12th	Rachel	Average	
26	Female	Caucasian	12th	Rachel	Average	
26 Total	14 Male	13 Students of Color			10 Low	3 SPED
	12 Female	13 Caucasian			10 Average	9 ESL
					6 High	

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Questions**

1. Describe yourself as a reader. (Do you like to read? Why or why not?)
2. What materials do you read regularly because you have to? What do you do with the information that you read?
3. What materials do you read regularly for reasons other than that you have to? Why do you read these things?
4. What do you think school/teachers should do to help kids read more and enjoy reading more?
5. Describe yourself as a writer. (Do you like to write? Why or why not?)
6. What kinds of things do you write regularly because you have to? What do you do with the information that you write?
7. What kind of writing do you do regularly for reasons other than that you have to? Why do you do this kind of writing?

## Appendix C

### Overall Percentages by Subgroups

	Percentage of Overall Students	Male	Female	Caucasian	Students of Color	English Language Learners	Special Education	High Achievers	Average Achievers	Low Achievers
Theme 1: Reading and Writing for Specific Purposes	96%	93%	100%	92%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	90%
Theme 1a: Reading and Writing to complete an assignment	81%	86%	75%	77%	85%	78%	100%	100%	70%	70%
Theme 1a: Reading (only) to complete an assignment	65%	79%	50%	54%	77%	78%	300%	100%	60%	50%
Theme 1a: Writing (only) to complete and assignment	42%	43%	42%	54%	31%	11%	67%	33%	50%	40%
Theme 1b: Reading and writing to process emotions	58%	36%	83%	46%	69%	67%	33%	67%	60%	50%
Theme 1b: Reading (only) to process emotions	27%	14%	42%	31%	23%	33%	0%	33%	30%	20%

**Appendix C** (Continued)

	Percentage of Overall Students	Male	Female	Caucasian	Students of Color	English Language Learners	Special Education	High Achievers	Average Achievers	Low Achievers
Theme 1b: Writing to process emotions	54%	36%	75%	38%	69%	67%	33%	67%	50%	50%
Theme 1c: Reading and writing for entertainment	42%	50%	33%	46%	38%	33%	33%	33%	40%	50%
Theme 1c: Reading (only) for entertainment	31%	36%	25%	31%	31%	22%	33%	17%	40%	30%
Theme 1c: Writing (only) for entertainment	8%	14%	0%	0%	8%	11%	0%	0%	0%	10%
Theme 1d: Reading for knowledge	27%	36%	17%	23%	31%	56%	0%	17%	50%	10%
Theme 2: Digital Literacies	96%	93%	100%	85%	100%	100%	100%	83%	100%	100%
Theme 2a: Digital Literacy for Communication	65%	50%	83%	62%	69%	78%	100%	50%	90%	50%

## Appendix C (Continued)

	Percentage of Overall Students	Male	Female	Caucasian	Students of Color	English Language Learners	Special Education	High Achievers	Average Achievers	Low Achievers
Theme 2b: Digital Literacy for Entertainment	27%	21%	33%	38%	15%	11%	0%	33%	40%	30%
Theme 3: Choice	77%	79%	75%	69%	85%	67%	33%	67%	90%	70%
Theme 3a: Choice in Reading	62%	64%	58%	54%	69%	67%	33%	67%	60%	60%
Theme 3b: Choice in Writing	62%	64%	58%	46%	77%	67%	33%	67%	60%	60%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

**Dixie Massey, Ph.D.** teaches at the University of Washington. Her research interests include literacy education and teacher research. Currently, she serves as Historian for the Association of Literacy Researchers and Educators as well as the National Reading Conference. Her articles have appeared in such publications as *The Reading Teacher*, *Reading Research and Instruction*, *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and *The Journal of Literacy Research*. She is the co-author of the curriculum series, *Comprehension Strategies for World History and U.S. History in the Social Studies*.

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**Rachel Johnson** has worked in Western Washington as a secondary educator for seven years; most recently, supporting schools as a teacher, instructional coach, and facilitator of professional development. She has a Master of Education in Instructional Leadership from the University of Washington, with a focus in literacy leadership at the secondary level. As a result of her work with alternative high school and middle level students, her research interests include culturally responsive teaching and learning, standards-based assessment, and the reading lives of secondary school students. In the past year, she has completed an unpublished thesis, "Using Team-Based Collaborative Inquiry to Challenge Assumptions and Rethink Content Literacy Instruction: An Action Research Project."

**Julie Learned** taught secondary students with learning disabilities as a special educator in public schools. She holds master's degrees in education from Harvard and the University of Washington. Currently, she is a doctoral student at the University of Michigan studying adolescent literacy.

**Pullout or Inclusion:  
A Longitudinal Study of Reading Achievement of  
English Language Learners in Grades 1 and 2**

**LISHU YIN**

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and

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*The enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs) from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 has increased 65% over a 10-year period from the 1993–1994 to the 2003–2004 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). ELLs are placed in a variety of educational programs. The purpose of this study was to compare the changes in reading levels of 202 ELLs in grades 1 and 2 over 2 consecutive school years (2004–2006) in 15 elementary schools (in 11 pullout programs and 4 inclusion programs) in a U.S. Midwest inner-city school district. A causal–comparative design was used to determine the program in which ELLs would make more progress in reading. Descriptive analysis was conducted on students' scores by program and by grade level. Analysis of covariance was used to determine if program placement made any significant difference in reading levels. The results indicated that the type of program (pullout or inclusion) did not result in a statistically significant difference ( $p = .11$ ) in ELLs' reading achievement.*

Based on the 2000 U.S. Census, about 9.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 spoke a language other than English at home, which was an increase of 54.7% compared with the 1990 census (Crawford, 2001). According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education (2005), 5,013,539 English language learners (ELLs) were enrolled from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 in public schools for the 2003–2004 school year, while in the 1993–1994 school year, the reported enrollment was 3,037,922. The rate of increase was 65% over a 10-year period. The number of ELLs in the school year of 2003–2004 was 10.1% of the total enrollment of the public school. In the United States, over 100 languages

are spoken by students in schools; by the year of 2030, an estimated 40% of the school-aged population will come from families whose first language is not English (Thomas & Collier, 2001).

Across the country, based on the needs and characteristics of a school district, different programs such as pullout English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), push-in ESOL, self-contained bilingual classrooms with ESOL instruction, self-contained newcomer school, grade-level elementary classrooms, sheltered content area instruction, and newcomer career academy are provided for ELLs (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002). Pullout programs have been adopted by Title I programs for struggling readers (King, 1990). Funded by the U.S. federal government, the Title I program aims to “help disadvantaged children meet high standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The Council of the Great City Schools (Antunez, 2003) in Washington, DC investigated the numbers and characteristics of ELLs in member inner-city school districts. The responses from 36 districts (62%) indicated that the number of ELLs was increasing and that the pullout program was the second most commonly offered program.

Zigmond and Backer (1996) pointed out that inclusion programs have been adopted more and more progressively for special education (SPED) programs rather than used as an alternative program. Inclusion or full inclusion is the practice of serving students with special needs completely within the general education setting (Ferguson, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1995). Albridge and Goldman (2002) explained that inclusion was “a movement that was designed to bring special education services into the general education” (p.134). According to Zigmond and Jenkins (1995), because Title I pullout programs have not been a success in serving a large number of struggling readers, the educators and researchers who wanted to reform Title I programs have advocated replacing pullout compensatory education services with inclusion programs. Harper and Platt (1998) reported that the same trend has started to take place in teaching ELLs. Zehr (2006) reported that, with the goal of meeting each individual student’s need, Saint Paul public school district replaced pullout programs with inclusion programs at all elementary schools over the last 7 years.

The educational decisions made regarding ELLs could have a remarkable impact on their future, and it is crucial to meeting the learning needs of the increasing population of ELLs (William, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) reported that Hispanic students’ dropout rates are higher than white and black students. According to Ma (2002), presently no strategies have been adopted to address the academic



needs of ELLs comprehensively and sufficiently. In addition, Ma pointed out that research has found that the achievement gaps are widening between the native English speaker and ELLs. Furthermore, he emphasized that who made the decision was not as important as what worked for ELLs. Yet, to date, little empirical study has been conducted to determine the effects of pullout and inclusion programs on ELLs' reading progress. Therefore, our investigation on the effectiveness of programs on ELLs' academic progress is an effort to address this gap in the literature.

## **Purpose of the Study**

With relatively little research related directly to the effectiveness of pullout and inclusion programs on the reading improvement of ELLs, the purpose of this study was to compare the changes in reading scores of ELLs in grades 1 and 2 over two consecutive school years (2004–2006) in the pullout programs and the inclusion programs in a Midwest inner-city school district with a large population of ELLs. The longitudinal dataset of the same students' reading scores was used over a course of two school years so that the change in students' reading levels could be measured. In order to measure the overall effectiveness of the programs on students' reading improvement, the scores of ELLs from two grade levels were examined. The question guiding this research was: *After ELLs are placed in pullout programs and inclusion programs respectively for two years, in which program do students make the most progress in reading over time?* The research findings can help administrators and teachers gain some insights into what programs are best to implement to meet the reading needs of ELLs.

## **Literature Review**

Researchers have been arguing about the effectiveness of the pullout program on students' reading achievement. Findings have remained inconclusive (Anstrom, 1995; Cater, 1984; Jakubowski & Ogletree, 1993; Meyer, 2001; Mieux, 1992; Passow, 1989; Saginaw Public Schools of Michigan Department of Evaluation Services, 1992; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1992). Some findings (Jakubowski & Ogletree, 1993; Javis-Janik, 1993; Van Leonen & Haley, 1994; Yap, Enoki, & Ishitani, 1998) indicate that pullout programs are not effective in contributing to students' reading achievement; whereas some others imply that pullout programs are beneficial (Begoray, 2001; Golembesky, Bean, & Goldstein, 1997; Mieux, 1992; Saginaw Public Schools of Michigan Department of Evaluation Services, 1992).

According to Yap, Enoki, and Ishitani (1988), the pullout setting

and ESOL instruction were not effective in helping ELLs adjust to American culture and school life in Hawaii, and ELLs performed better when placed in the regular classrooms. Their finding reinforced what Van Leonen and Haley (1994) had emphasized: minimal effects for second language instruction were observed in a pullout setting for the purpose of second language acquisition. Jakubowski and Ogletree (1993) found no statistical significance in reading achievement between academically at-risk students in the pullout program and those in the regular program over a one-year period in a Chicago elementary school. Javis-Janik (1993) confirmed Jakubowski and Ogletree's findings. However, Jakubowski and Ogletree did point out that the length of their study was not long enough and suggested that further study for a longer period of time should be conducted. Following this suggestion, we investigated the effectiveness of the pullout and inclusion programs on ELLs' reading achievement over a period of two school years.

Contrary to the previous findings, Golembesky, Bean, and Goldstein (1997) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of Title I pullout programs aligned with PUSH-UPS programs for five third-grade struggling readers. The results suggested that a Title 1 pullout program could be effective if it were combined with other developmental programs such as PUSH-UPS. Their conclusion echoed the findings of Mieux (1992) and Saginaw Public Schools of Michigan Department of Evaluation Services (1992). Bogeray (2001) conducted a study in Manitoba, Canada, through the Literacy Groups Project to investigate if the second-graders who were struggling in reading could reach the average second-grade reading levels through a small group pullout program. The results indicated that the students could read on or around grade level if the students were assigned in a group in accordance with their reading level where they were instructed in the small group setting with appropriate teaching materials.

While some research (e.g., Begoray, 2001; Mieux, 1992; Saginaw Public Schools of Michigan Department of Evaluation Services, 1992) has found that pullout programs are effective in improving ELLs' reading ability, some studies either had a small sample size (Mieux, 1992) or the pullout program was aligned with another literacy program (Golembesky, Bean, & Goldstein). With the intention of finding how effective the pullout program was, Meyer (2001) used the statistical results of a sample of 12,012 students in the U.S. in grades 1, 3, and 7 for the 1992–1993 school year to investigate the organizational differentiation to Title I programs (pullout, in-class, add-on, and replacement programs) and its effect on students' learning opportunities. Meyer concluded that due to the lack of convincing proof for the effectiveness of Title I programs in which the pullout program was

the dominant approach, further research was needed to examine program effectiveness. Meyer's conclusion was in agreement with that of Anstrom's (1995) that the effectiveness of the pullout programs in addressing the needs of the students was questioned by educators and researchers.

Ferguson (1992) remarked that pullout programs were neither perfect nor were they the best solution to every child's reading problems; yet, pullout programs were the only available source of extra help that many children could receive. Due to negative responses toward pullout programs, inclusion has been used for Title I programs since 1985 (Anstrom, 1995). Few research studies have been conducted to examine the progress of ELLs in the full inclusion setting (Harper & Platt, 1998). Cummings (1984) pointed out a lot of similarities in instructional needs between SPEDs and ELLs. Although some of the instructional planning prepared for the SPED students might be suitable for ELLs, whether these students would benefit from inclusion programs still needs to be examined (Harper & Platt, 1998).

Like the findings concerning the effectiveness of the pullout program on students' reading achievement, the findings of research on the effectiveness of inclusion programs on struggling readers and ELLs are also inconclusive (e.g., Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994/1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 1995; Smelter & Rasch, 1995; Yatvin, 1995; Zigmond & Baker, 1996). Zigmond and Jenkins (1995) examined three inclusion programs for struggling readers in six different schools and reported that general education settings were neither desirable nor satisfactory as far as the achievement outcomes were concerned even though the finding indicated that half of the students with a learning disability made a significant gain in reading achievement. However, McLeskey and Waldron (1995) argued that the standard used to determine the effectiveness of a program on ELLs' reading progress by Zigmond and Jenkins was too high to be achieved by either an inclusive or a pullout program. In addition, they strongly disagreed that the inclusion program was called a 'model' in Zigmond and Jenkins' research, and they believed that any program was subject to be examined and changed. Baker, Wang, and Walbery (1994/1995) conducted a meta-analysis of three studies to decide on the effects of inclusive settings on student learning and social relation with peers. Even though the effects of inclusion on ELLs' learning and social relation with peers were positive and meaningful, the difference was very small. Zigmond and Baker (1996) reinforced what Baker et al. proposed. Zigmond and Baker did not think the complete elimination of a pullout program was a good idea and stated that inclusion was fine, but full inclusion was not entirely good for students with special needs because skills and strategies needed to be taught clearly and intensively in a goal-directed setting.

To respond to the limited research conducted to investigate the academic achievement and social behaviors of students with learning disabilities after they were placed in either an inclusion program or a pullout program, Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002) conducted a comparative study to investigate the relationship between placement in inclusive and pullout special education programs at two different school sites in the same school district. The results showed that students in the inclusion program had a significantly higher mean score on the language and mathematics subtests of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The district in Saint Paul, MN, has replaced ESOL pullout programs with inclusion for all elementary students over the past seven years, and the district has made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for three out of four years to close the gap between the ELLs and the native English speakers (Zerh, 2006). York-Barr, Ghere, and Sommers (2007) conducted a 3-year urban case study of 150 to 160 students in grades 1 and 2 at one Midwest elementary school. Of the participants, about 50% were identified as ELLs and 5% as special education. Guided reading was used as the reading instruction method in this case. The findings indicated positive academic progress in both reading and math when students received instruction in inclusive settings.

Both pullout and inclusion programs have been used and will continue to be used to serve struggling readers and ELLs. However, findings on the effectiveness of pullout programs and inclusive programs on ELLs' reading progress are still inconclusive. The arguments concerning which program is most beneficial to improving ELLs' reading achievement continue. Clarity on this issue requires further research. In this study, we sought to address the research question: *After ELLs are placed in pullout programs and inclusion programs respectively for two years, in which program do students make the most progress in reading?*

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

In the school year of 2004–2005, there were 293 students in grades 1 and 2 (152 first-graders and 141 second-graders). All of them were tested and qualified for ESOL service provided by the school district. They either did not know any English or had limited English proficiency. Of the 293 students, 75 (45 first-graders and 30 second-graders) were served in the pullout programs and 218 (107 in the first grade and 111 in the second grade) in the inclusion programs. In the school year of 2005–2006, 91 out of 293 students moved either to another school or out of the school district. Among the remaining 202 students, 38 (23 in the second grade and 15 in the third grade) were in the pullout programs and 164 (81 in the second

grade and 83 in the third grade) in the inclusion programs.

### ***Research Design***

In this study, the researchers did not control the placement of students or schools into either a pullout or an inclusion program. The students were assigned to their neighborhood school by the school district. Pullout and inclusion programs, which were implemented by the school district, were the noted difference between the two groups. The consequence of this difference, which was the effectiveness of each program on ELLs' reading progress, was examined in this study. Hence, a causal-comparative design was used to determine differences in student scores by the type of program. A casual-comparative design is characterized by the "lack of randomization and inability to manipulate an independent variable" (Frankel & Wallen, 2006, p. 374).

Reading scores of ELLs in grades 1 and 2 in 15 elementary schools of an inner-city school district in the Midwest over two years (2004–2006) were used in this study. Reading scores were examined longitudinally to determine whether students in the ESOL pullout program or the ESOL inclusion program scored statistically significantly higher in reading achievement. The pretest scores served as the covariate. Program type (inclusion program or pullout program) and grade level (first grade, second grade, or third grade) were the independent variables, and the dependent variable was the posttest scores on the Rigby PM Benchmark Test. The scores represented students' instructional reading levels.

### ***Instrumentation***

Rigby Leveled PM Readers (Rigby, 2003) were used as the guided reading materials for the ELLs as required by the Department of English as a Second Language in the school district. Leveled Readers is a leveled book collection that has "a large set of books organized by level of difficulty—from very easy books appropriate for emergent readers to longer, complex books for advanced readers in the intermediate grades" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999, p. 15). The school district adopted a guided reading approach to serve ELLs with no English or limited English proficiency. Classroom teachers of the inclusion programs and ESOL teachers in the pullout programs received the guided reading training provided by the district. According to Rigby, children in these small groups have either similar reading levels or similar reading behavior; as the school year continues, children can be moved among the groups based on their progress. The differentiation of the leveled readers ranged from 1 to 30, and Rigby (2008) provided a table to illustrate the correlation between the Rigby Benchmark levels and the grade

levels (e.g., first grade, second grade). Rigby (2003) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the PM collection on students' reading achievements at an elementary school from K–3 in the central region of California during the 2001–2002 school year. The findings indicated that the number of students who could read on grade level steadily increased, and the PM leveled reader collection was shown to be effective in supporting reading of ELLs at the primary grade level.

Rigby PM Benchmark Kit (Nelley & Smith, 2000) is a testing tool to identify the students' (a) instructional reading level, (b) ability to read for meaning, and (c) ability to integrate meaning with structural and visual cues. Correlated to the Rigby PM and PM Plus leveled reader collection, the kit contains 30 leveled texts ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade progressively. A transcript of each book is provided on a separate sheet so the teacher can use it to complete a running record (Clay, 2000), when the student is reading the book. According to Clay (2000), "the prime purpose of a Running Record is to understand more about how children are using what they know to get to the messages of the text, or in other words what reading processes they are using" (p. 8). While the student is reading, the teacher records the student's error such as "deletion, insertion, and omissions" (Fawson, Ludlow, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Rock, 2006). After the student finishes reading, he or she is asked questions about the story to check comprehension. Then the ratio of the error to the word count of the text is converted to the reading accuracy. If a student can read a text with 90% accuracy and comprehension, the level of the book is established as the student's appropriate reading level. The data for this study were the ELLs' reading levels, which could be converted to the grade reading levels according to the chart provided by Rigby (2008). According to Nelley and Smith (2000), each text in the Benchmark Kit has been tested to "guarantee the suitability and readability for a particular level" (p. 8). However, Fawson et al. (2006) found that variance within the leveled readers was identified due to each text's "level, structure, type, and topic" (p. 124). Thus, variability in running record scores exists. Fountas and Pinnell (1999) stated that "a level is only an approximation and there is some variability expected within it" (p. 15).

The Rigby PM Benchmark Test was required by the school district for all ELLs at the beginning and the end of each school year as benchmark scores. For both pre- and post-benchmark tests, ELLs are requested to read a Rigby book for "cold reading," which means the book must be unfamiliar to the student. The pre-benchmark test scores and post-benchmark test scores were used to assess reading growth over two years in this study. As the PM Benchmark Test is correlated with the PM collection, it can

be considered an effective assessment tool for measuring the students' progress in reading after the students use PM leveled readers as their reading materials. Therefore, the Rigby PM Benchmark Kit was used as the assessment of students' reading achievement in this study.

***Data Collection***

With the support of the ESOL office of the school district, the longitudinal data of students' testing scores were collected in August 2005 and June 2006. Of the 15 elementary schools, pullout programs were implemented in 11 schools and inclusion programs in 4 schools. Only the data of the students who stayed for two consecutive years were collected and used. The detailed information on the number of student scores used in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Student Scores Used in Each Grade and Year

Programs	2004–2005			2005–2006		
	1st Grade n	2nd Grade n	Total N	2nd Grade n	3rd Grade n	Total N
Pullout	45	30	75	23	15	38
Inclusion	107	111	218	81	83	164
Total	152	141	293	104	98	202

***Data Analysis***

Data used for the statistical analysis were the scores (reading levels) of 202 students who attended either program for two complete, consecutive school years from 2004 to 2006 at 15 different elementary schools, so data from both 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 were combined into one data set for analysis. The combined data included 2004–2005 pre-test and post-test scores and 2005–2006 pre-test and post-test scores. Of the 202 students, 38 were in the pullout programs (23 completed the first and second grades, and 15 completed the second and third grades), and 164 were in the inclusion programs (81 completed first and second grades, and 83 completed second and third grades). The statistical data were the scores students received on pre- and post-benchmark tests. They reflected the students' benchmark reading levels or their instructional levels. The benchmark reading levels were converted into regular grade levels (Rigby, 2008).

The following tests were performed to check the assumptions of ANCOVA:



- a. Dubin-Watson coefficient was 1.57 (between 1.5 and 2.5), so the independent observations have been met.
- b. The skewness, 1.25 (between +2 and -2), indicated the normal distribution of the data, which signified that most of the scores of the 2004–2005 pretest fell into the negative lower end. In this case, the result suggested that there were lower levels in reading.
- c. Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variance checked the homogeneity of the dependent variable of 2005–2006 posttest reading scores. The result ( $p = .83$ ) showed that the dependent variable was equal across the groups (pullout and inclusion programs).
- d. Person  $r$  was .56, and the significance level  $p$  was .001, which indicated that there was a strong correlation between the dependent variable and the covariate.

Descriptive analysis was conducted on student scores by program and by grade level. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine if the program made any significant statistical difference in student reading performance. The covariate was the Rigby Benchmark pretest scores.

The results of ANCOVA were used to determine the program in which ELLs would make the most progress in reading after they were placed in pullout programs or inclusion programs respectively. Only the data of those students who stayed in two consecutive school years were used. With the significance level ( $\alpha$  level) set at 0.05, the posttest scores of the 2004–2005 and the 2005–2006 school years were the dependent variables, and the program type (pullout program or inclusion program) and grade level (first grade, second grade, and third grade) were independent variables, whereas the covariates were the pretest scores of the 2004–2005 and the 2005–2006 school years. The covariates were used to control for the initial group differences. Mean scores were compared, and the  $p$  value determined if the programs would make a statistically significant difference in the reading progress of ELLs.

## **Results**

### ***Mean Scores by Programs***

The descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the students’ reading performance in both the pullout and the inclusion programs. Table 2 presents the findings.

The mean scores of the students’ reading levels in the inclusion programs were slightly higher on the pretest and the posttest for both years, which indicated that the reading levels of the students in the inclusion programs



Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Overall Reading Levels of Students of Both Grade Levels and Programs over 2 School Years

Program	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	Diff. Between Programs	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
04–05 Pretest				0.44	0.25	.62
Pullout	4.79	4.47	38			
Inclusion	5.23	4.94	164			
04–05 Posttest				1.07	0.70	.40
Pullout	13.11	6.23	38			
Inclusion	14.18	7.36	164			
05–06 Pretest				0.83	0.41	.52
Pullout	12.63	6.07	38			
Inclusion	13.46	7.41	164			
05–06 Posttest				1.93	2.59	.11
Pullout	19.68	5.47	38			
Inclusion	21.61	6.89	164			

were a little higher than students in the pullout programs at the beginning of this study. Differences of the mean scores of the students’ reading levels in the pullout and the inclusion programs for the four different benchmark tests were 0.44, 1.07, 0.83, and 1.93. No statistically significant difference was found in the mean scores in these two programs. The results indicated that students in the inclusion programs could read books two levels higher than students in the pullout programs. Over the two-year period from the beginning of the 2004–2005 school year to the end of 2005–2006 school year, ELLs’ reading levels increased 75% in the pullout programs and 76% in the inclusion programs. In either program, compared with the posttest mean score of the 2004–2005 school year, the mean score of the 2005–2006 pretest dropped, which denoted that after the long summer break, regardless of the type of program in which the students were served in the previous year, their reading levels regressed. However, by the end of the second school year, students in both programs did not only pick up their lost reading levels but also gained more levels in reading.

Regardless of the grade level, after two consecutive school years, the students in the pullout programs could read Rigby leveled readers at about Level 20, whereas the students in the inclusion program could read at about Level 22. The difference was 1.93, which was almost two levels higher in the inclusion programs than in the pullout programs. According to Rigby catalog levels (Rigby, 2008), Level 20 and Level 22 were in the same stage of early

fluency. The slight difference showed that the students in the pullout programs could read books at the middle stage of early fluency, while the students in the inclusion programs could read books at the advanced stage of early fluency.

***Mean Scores by Grade Levels and Programs***

The descriptive analysis was performed to determine the mean scores of the students' reading levels by grade level in two different programs. Table 3 presents the mean scores by grade level in the pullout programs and in the inclusion programs, and Table 4 illustrates the reading levels gained by students in pullout and inclusion programs.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Reading Achievement of Students in the Pullout Programs and the Inclusion Programs by Grade Level

School Year	Grade/Program	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
04-05 Pretest	1			
	Pullout	1.96	1.85	23
	Inclusion	3.25	2.94	81
	2			
	Pullout	9.13	3.76	15
	Inclusion	7.16	5.69	83
04-05 Posttest	1			
	Pullout	10.52	5.23	23
	Inclusion	12.60	6.87	81
	2			
	Pullout	17.07	5.64	15
	Inclusion	15.72	7.49	83
05-06 Pretest	2			
	Pullout	9.87	4.69	23
	Inclusion	11.69	6.75	81
	3			
	Pullout	16.87	5.59	15
	Inclusion	15.19	7.66	83
05-06 Posttest	2			
	Pullout	18.61	5.95	23
	Inclusion	20.84	6.75	81
	3			
	Pullout	21.33	4.38	15
	Inclusion	22.36	6.98	83

Table 4. Reading Levels Gained by Students in the Pullout and the Inclusion Programs over 2 School Years (2004–2006)

School Year	Programs	Grade	Levels Gained	School Year	Programs	Grade	Levels Gained
04–05	Pullout	1	8.65	05–06	Pullout	2	8.74
		2	6.55			3	4.46
	Inclusion	1	9.35		Inclusion	2	9.15
		2	8.56			3	7.17

Compared with the scores of students in pullout programs, the second-graders’ mean scores were lower in the pretest and posttest of 2004–2006 and the pretest of 2005–2006, but they caught up in the posttest of 2005–2006 (22.36 vs. 21.33) at the end of the third grade. Overall, the mean scores of both the pre-and post-reading levels of students in the inclusion programs were slightly higher than that of the pullout programs in each grade level. However, compared with the reading levels gained in one or over two years, the students in the inclusion programs achieved higher levels in reading than those in the pullout programs.

After two complete school years, the mean score of the second-graders in the pullout programs was about 19, indicating that they could read books at Level 19, which was equivalent to the beginning–middle second-grade Basal reading level. According to the Rigby Level, they were at the beginning stage of early fluency. The third graders at the middle stage of early fluency could read books at Level 21, which was the second-grade Basal reading level. The second graders in the inclusion programs at the stage of early fluency could read books at Level 20, which was equivalent to the beginning–middle second-grade Basal reading level, while the third graders at the last stage of early fluency could read books at Level 22, which was the late stage of the second-grade Basal reading level.

Based on the Rigby level (Rigby, 2008), levels 17 to 22 all fall into the range of the second-grade Basal reading level, which was categorized as the stage of early fluency. Therefore, the average gains in students’ reading levels in both grades and both programs fell into the same category of early fluency even though there were slight differences in reading levels. However, the findings signified that at the end of two years, the second-graders could read at grade level in either program, but the third graders could only read at the second-grade level.

***Statistical Analysis by ANCOVA***

ANCOVA was performed to determine whether there was a significant statistical difference in students’ reading performance in the pullout

programs and the inclusion programs. Analysis of covariance is presented in Table 5. The dependent variable was the 2005–2006 posttest scores (reading levels), and the covariate was the 2004–2005 pretest scores (reading levels). With the significance level set at 0.05, the results ( $p = .11$ ) indicated no significant statistical difference in students’ reading performance.

Table 5. Analysis of Covariance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between(program)	78.07	1	78.07	2.55	.11
Error	6089.16	199	30.60		
Total	100158.00	202			

R Squared = .321 (Adjusted R Squared = .314)

Findings of descriptive analysis and ANCOVA suggested no statistically significant difference in the gain of reading levels between ELLs in the pullout programs and those in ELLs in inclusion programs was found. This finding suggests that program type (pullout or inclusion) did not make a significant difference in primary elementary ELLs’ reading achievement.

In previous studies, researchers (Golembesky, Bean, & Goldstein, 1997; McLeskey & Waldron, 1995; Mieux, 1992; Zigmond & Bakers, 1996; Zigmond & Jenkins, 1995) had different opinions about what could be considered as significant gains in reading achievements for students with learning disabilities and special needs in inclusion programs and pullout programs. Although the findings in this study did not indicate a statistically significant difference in the effect of pullout and inclusion programs on ELLs’ reading achievement, the ELLs in the inclusion programs could read books two levels higher than the students in the pullout programs over two consecutive school years.

## **Discussion**

Even though we could not locate similar studies to compare the reading achievement of ELLs in the primary grades after they were placed in pullout or inclusion programs, the findings of this research can still be linked to previous studies on pullout and inclusion programs for struggling readers, students below grade level, students with learning disabilities, or students at risk for academic failure. According to Cummins (1984), there are similarities in instructional needs between SPEDs and ELLs.

The findings of this study showed no statistically significant difference in reading achievement between students in the pullout program and those in the inclusion program, which is in agreement with the results of the research by Jakubowski and Ogletree (1993) and Javis-Janik (1993). However, the findings of this current study were in disagreement with the studies of Rea and McLaughlin et al. (2002) and Yap et al. (1988). In this study, at the end of the two complete school years, the reading levels (with the mean score representing students' reading level) of the ELLs in the inclusion programs were two levels higher than those in the pullout programs even though the difference of the two levels still fell into the category of early fluency according to Rigby Category Level. This finding confirmed what Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1994/1995) pointed out about the effects of inclusion on students' reading achievement being positive. Even though the effect sizes in these researchers' three meta-analyses "demonstrated a small to moderate" (p. 33) positive influence, their findings signified that students with special needs in inclusive settings achieved more academically and socially than those in pullout settings. The results also indicated that as the number of school years increased, the difference in mean scores (students' reading levels) between the pullout and the inclusion program may increase as well. York-Barr, Ghere, and Sommerness (2007) observed significant gain in students' reading in an inclusive setting, but it was just one case study at one elementary school.

Also noteworthy of this study is that after the students returned for the second school year, regardless of the program in which they were served the previous school year, ELLs' reading levels regressed after the summer break. This phenomenon could be contributed to the lack of exposure to literacy activities during the summer. However, students picked up their lost reading levels after they returned to school in the fall. Offering summer school programs to ELLs could help them maintain and even enhance their English language skills during the summer (DelliCarpini, 2009). Being exposed to literacy instruction consistently could make a significant difference in ELLs' academic achievement and performance over time.

As long as pullout programs and inclusion programs are practiced, argument about their effectiveness on ELL students' reading achievement will continue. The primary concern of meeting the needs of English speakers has been expanded to include meeting the needs of rapidly increasing ELLs in the school system (Williams, 2001). Because schooling is changing and students are changing as well (McLesky & Waldron, 1996), any ESOL program implemented at schools should not be set in stone. Any program that works to meet students' needs and uses the resources at each school to its fullest potential can be a sound program.

This study was conducted in an inner-city school district where a large population of ELLs was enrolled. The implementation of inclusion programs appeared to be more effective than pullout programs in the long run. In some suburban school districts or rural districts in which the enrollment of ELLs is low, inclusion might not be the best practice for them. Regardless of program, meeting every student's needs should be the goal.

## **Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

For the causal-comparative design of this study, there were three major concerns with the threats to internal validity: subject characteristics, subject mortality, and differences in implementing the program at each school.

- a. Subject characteristics: The characteristics of teachers are very different across the elementary schools. Some have more years of teaching experiences than others. Some have taught in both pullout and inclusion programs, but some have taught in only one program. The teachers' teaching experiences and training received in teaching ELLs could be expected to be related to students' reading achievements.
- b. Subject mortality: Because this study was conducted in an inner-city school district, subject mortality through student mobility was expected to be relatively high. During the two-year period of study, some students moved out of town or to another school. The overall mobility in this study was about 31% (see Table 1).
- c. Differences in implementation. The researchers could not control how each program was implemented at each school. How the program was implemented at each school and how the ESOL teachers and classroom teachers work together might contribute to the differences in ELLs' academic progress. With the purpose of examining the effect of programs on students' reading achievement over time, further research following the same group of ELLs for a longer period of time is suggested. Observations of how both programs are implemented are suggested. Interviews with regular classroom teachers and ESOL resource teachers as well as administrators on their opinions about pullout and inclusion programs are also recommended for future research because how the programs are implemented could explain the differences in the effectiveness of the two programs on ELLs' reading achievements.

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