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PERCEPTIONS OF BEGINNING READERS:
THOSE WHO STRUGGLE AND THOSE WHO SUCCEED

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Perceptions of Beginning Readers: Those Who Struggle and Those Who Succeed

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Statement of the problem. Viewing beginning readers through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of semiotic mediation, learning to read is a complex process in which meanings are not only encoded in print but shaped by the social and cultural experiences of the reader, the text, and the context in which the reading takes place. The purpose of this case study was to gain a holistic picture of four beginning readers of varying ability levels as they engage in literacy-learning activities in a first grade classroom and to answer the following questions, giving voice to each child as a beginning reader:

1. How do beginning readers perceive the nature of reading?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?
2. What meanings do beginning readers construct from their literacy-learning experiences?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?

Sample. Two successful beginning readers and two struggling beginning readers in a first grade classroom were selected based on fall benchmark assessments and in-class performance as observed by the teacher. Efforts were made to balance the sample according to gender, SES, and ethnicity.

Methods. Students were observed one day per week for twelve weeks. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant during the study to gain a sense of the child's understandings about the nature of reading and to see what meanings s/he constructs from literacy-related activities. Participants were also interviewed informally throughout the study as they engaged in various literacy learning activities. Documents and artifacts were collected as an additional way to give voice to the beginning reader (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) was used as a frame for developing individual case studies and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) to better understand the meanings children constructed about the nature of reading and the literacy-related instruction they experience.

Results and conclusions. The findings of this study suggest that succeeders and strugglers perceive the nature of reading differently, with succeeders viewing reading as a process of decoding text for meaning and strugglers viewing reading as a process of remembering. In addition, the findings suggest that succeeders and strugglers have different views of their instruction; print mediates the meanings constructed by succeeders in ways it does not for strugglers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the late 1980s, children's readiness for formal reading instruction was assumed to be a combination of skill acquisition and maturation. Typically, children were not formally taught to read until they had mastered skills such as letter recognition, fine motor control, and listening (Teale & Yokota, 2000). Proponents of maturational psychology claimed that if a child received reading instruction before they were developmentally ready, usually at about the age of six and one-half, the child was more likely to struggle with reading, not only initially, but "...discouragement sometimes resulted in a mental set against reading, which lasted for years and which hampered all their school work" (Morphett & Washburn, 1931, p. 496). A "beginning reader" was assumed to be just that—a novice at a brand new skill, the learning of which he/she needed to be developmentally ready to handle.

By the late 1980s, education professionals began to think differently about the way children's literacy skills develop (Butler & Clay, 1982; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Rather than seeing the child's first formal instruction in letters, sounds, and/or words as the beginning of reading instruction, a child's first exposures to print, as well as oral language, were viewed as significant components of literacy development. "Learning to read" was replaced by the more comprehensive "becoming literate". Viewing beginning reading from an emergent literacy perspective confirmed what many teachers had learned intuitively through working with young children: When a child enters kindergarten, he or she comes with not just a lunchbox and a new pack of crayons, but with traits, behaviors,

and a history of experiences that will impact his or her ability to profit from the instruction that is offered. The Emergent Literacy paradigm also complicated the notion of literacy, viewing reading, writing, speaking, and listening as interrelated processes (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

The research on beginning readers indicates that the reasons some children struggle to learn to read are complex and may be cognitive, biological, instructional, or socio-cultural in origin (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). While Clay (1982) drew attention to the idea that not all children come to school with the same understandings about text; i.e., “concepts about print,” recent literature continues to shed light on the ways in which social and cultural experiences can impact a child’s ability to profit from instruction in the primary grades (Cazden, 2001; Gallas & Smagorinsky, 2002; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Such work has played an important role in identifying mismatches between literacy instruction and the young learner.

Although helpful in developing a more complete picture of the beginning reader, most of the current literature views literacy narrowly, as a singular construct, i.e., the kind of reading and writing done in school (Street & Street, 1991). Literacy is viewed as a set of skills to be mastered. This view lends itself to a deficit model of reading failure, as explained by Guitierrez (2002):

Children who come to our schools without the appropriate linguistic, cognitive, and social skills deemed necessary for academic success are considered by many educators to be at risk for failure. Often, the educational focus centers around students’ perceived deficits, cultural or otherwise. These “deficits” in turn call for some type of prescribed remediation to “fix” the deficit. This deficit perspective ignores both the cognitive and linguistic schema already in place in these children, while dismissing the forms and functions of language utilized within their sociocultural and sociolinguistic environs outside of the educational context (Flores, Tefft Cousin, & Diaz, 1991) (p. 50).

A socioconstructivist lens, in which literacy is understood not as singular, but as multiliteracies, i.e., reading, writing, and other uses of language in everyday activities in the home, community, and workplace, as well as school (Hull & Schultz, 2002) informs this study.

Theoretical Framework

My understanding of beginning literacy development and the design of this study have been influenced by a socioconstructivist frame rooted in Vygotsky's theory about the development of thought and language (1978), which has been extended and applied by others (Barton, 1994; Gee, 2001a; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1938; Wertsch, 1991). In contrast to Piaget's claim that language emerges as a result of cognitive development (Gruber & Voneche, 1995), Vygotsky (1978) argues that language and the development of cognitive processes are intertwined and neither can be viewed apart from the child's social and cultural context.

Semiotic Mediation

Vygotsky's (1978) notion of semiotic mediation provides a useful framework for understanding children who struggle with beginning reading and writing. According to Vygotsky, children's social and cultural experiences mediate the development of language and thought. Given the social and cultural diversity of today's classrooms, this framework is especially useful.

Through social interactions children develop an understanding of language's semiotic, i.e., encoded nature (Vygotsky, 1978); however, not only is language itself encoded, but the contexts of its use are encoded as well (Gallas & Smagorinsky, 2002; Gee, 2005). If, as Vygotsky claims, language does not simply reflect thought, but *is* thought, and if

cultural and social practices mediate language and thought, then an understanding of the developing literacy learner cannot be undertaken apart from the contextual factors that shape the perceptions of the beginning reader.

Literacy as Social Practice

Studies of communication have demonstrated the differences in literacy practices within communities (Heath, 1983) and researchers have shown how such differences can prepare children differently for school, with some children's practices matching more closely with the literacy practices valued in school than others, thereby affecting children's ability to succeed in the classroom (Cazden, 2001; Heath, 1982). The New Literacy Studies (NLS; e.g., Street & Street, 1991) opened up the definition of "literacy," using the term "multiliteracies" instead. The NLS not only acknowledge out-of-school literacy practices, but demonstrate the embeddedness of literate practices in everyday activities with both traditional and non-traditional texts (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

Though Vygotsky lays a framework for understanding the contextual factors that shape the development of language and thought, he does not articulate the specifics. Building on Vygotsky's work, Lave & Wenger (1991) argue that learning, i.e., the reorganization of mental representations, is situated in participation between members of a community of shared practice (such as a classroom of beginning readers), rather than in the minds of individuals. Thus, beginning readers can be seen as mediated not only at the macro-level by social and cultural factors such as interactions with family and community, but also at the micro-level of participation with members of the classroom community, including both teacher and fellow beginners.

Barton (1994) extends the work of Lave & Wenger (1991), viewing literacy in a way that is consistent with a participation framework. Barton sees literacy as embedded in the social practices of a cultural community, with language being the primary tool used by members to construct understanding. Others have noted how patterns of language use can differ among communities of practice (Gee, 2005; Heath, 1983), which can complicate literacy learning for beginners (Cazden, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

The Reader and the Reading Process

Understanding the reader as mediated by social and cultural practices necessitates viewing the process of reading as far more complex than merely decoding words to extract information from text. The young literacy learner, an experienced meaning-maker (Kress, 1997), is an integral part of the transaction that occurs between reader and text, with reader, text, and context coming together in complex, dynamic ways (Barton, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1938).

Research on Beginning Readers

To create a more complete picture of the beginning reader, research from three paradigms was reviewed: 1) family and emergent literacy, 2) cognitive processing models of reading, and 3) metacognition.

The Struggling Beginner

Research from a cognitive processing perspective suggests that the hallmark of struggling beginning readers is phonological deficiency (Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel Report, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Speece, Mills, Ritchey, & Hillman, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, Chen, & Denckla, 1996; Wagner, Torgeson, Rashotte, Hecht, Barker, Burgess, Donahue, & Garon, 1997); however,

whether such deficiencies predict long-term difficulties has been called into question (Speece & Ritchey, 2005), and whether there are better predictors of success has also been questioned (Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002).

Taking a more holistic look at the beginning reader from a Family Literacy perspective, a growing body of research suggests that when the uses of language and literacy in the home differ from school uses, literacy learning can be complicated for young children (Cazden, 2001; Gallas & Smagorinsky, 2002; Heath, 1983). Purcell-Gates' work suggests that families differ in the extent to which print mediates daily activities (1995) and that experience with print plays an important role in formal literacy learning (2004).

The Successful Beginner

Stage Model theorists contend that the successful reader typically develops according to predictable stages (Ehri, 1991; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998). Though cognitive development has been found to correlate with the development of beginning reading skills (Polk & Goldstein, 1980), intelligence has not been found to be a reliable predictor of success in reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). However, well-developed oral language skills correlate with early reading (Huba & Ramisetty-Mikler, 1995) and success in beginning reading (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Pikulski & Tobin, 1989). Successful beginning readers are typically "paper and pencil kids," with differences in play preferences being evident throughout childhood (Thomas, 1984). Not all children who come from literacy-rich home environments succeed as beginning readers; however, such an environment can play a role (Milner, 1951) and the literacy practices (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2005) and the literacy-related beliefs of parents (Baker & Scher,

2002), as well as the richness of children's preschool literacy experiences (Neuman, 2004) have also been found to impact children's success.

Metacognitive Awareness

Metacognition has been found to play a key role in successful reading (Lau & Chan, 2003; Roeschl-Heils, Schneider & van Kraayenoord, 2003). The research suggests that although young children may not have a fully developed sense of metacognitive awareness, such awareness continues to improve throughout childhood (Flavell, Green, Flavell, & Grossman, 1997), and is even displayed on some level by preschoolers (Cox, 1994).

Children's Perceptions about Literacy

Perhaps because some researchers concluded that children's perceptions tend to be shaped by their teachers (Weaver, 1994) and are subject to change (Kazelskis, et al., 2004/2005), studies on the perceptions of beginning readers are limited. However, a sociocultural view of reading posits that the meanings a beginning reader constructs as a participant in a community of shared practice are valuable. Viewed from this lens, children's perceptions are snapshots of meaning, valuable for what they suggest when viewed holistically. Oldfather (2002) argues that exploring such meanings, subjective though they may be, is critical to understanding why individuals respond as they do. Work by Dahl & Freppon (1995), Dahl, Barto, Bonfils, Carasello, Christopher, Davis, Erkkila, Glander, Jacobs, Kendra, Koski, Majeski, McConnell, Petrie, Siegel, Slaby, Waldbauer, & Williams (2003) and Evans (2002) illustrate the potential for utilizing children's perceptions as a catalyst for improving instruction.

A socioconstructivist lens informs the design and methodology of this study. Children's perceptions are seen not as static notions held by the learner as if s/he were a container in which such ideas were held and carried about through the school day. Rather, consistent with a situated activity perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991), perceptions are viewed as "meaning events" constructed in-the-moment, as participants engage in activity within a community of shared practice. Thus, a case study design was chosen in order to explore and contextualize the children's perceptions. A socioconstructivist frame also informs data collection. What children say is examined in relation to what they do. Responses to interview questions, observations of activity within the classroom, and classroom artifacts are looked at over time and in relation to each another.

Statement of the Problem

While research has contributed much, particularly in recent years, toward our understanding of the many factors that can complicate and facilitate learning to read, we know little about the perceived experiences of children themselves. Most of the work that has been done is from the perspective of adults, i.e., adults as teachers, adults as literacy experts and researchers, and even parents of young literacy learners. Researchers have identified factors that correlate with success and those that predict failure, including biological, cognitive, instructional, and environmental factors.

In recent years, the government has taken an interest in the plight of struggling readers. This has resulted in two major works that have synthesized the current research, yielding the conclusion that reading difficulties result from a dynamic interaction of both experiential and cognitive/biological factors and that effective instruction, particularly in

the primary grades, is critical (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998); five “pillars” considered integral for effective beginning reading instruction have been identified as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel Report, 2000). No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation has ushered in an era of accountability, with some schools adopting a medical model of reading disability. In this model, reading proficiency is seen as “health” and reading difficulties are treated as “illness,” with “symptoms” of reading difficulties being identified early and “treated” aggressively with intensive, scripted interventions.

NLS researchers such as Gee (2001b) have criticized governmental efforts to fix reading problems, arguing that such a narrow, singular view of reading as a set of skills to be mastered privileges school-based literacy practices that are removed from everyday activities outside of school. Research from a NLS perspective has shown that children bring to school with them “funds of knowledge,” (Moll, 1992) that mediate and inform in-school literacy learning (Dyson, 2002). Such knowledge is largely ignored when literacy is viewed as a set of skills (e.g., Good & Kaminski, 2002). Students are seen as deficient when they come to school without school-based literacy skills, like letter-sounds and letter-names. Yet remediation efforts to correct such deficits through intensive remediation efforts are not always effective as shown in the two pilot studies that inform the present study (Brown, 2005; 2007).

It is in such contexts that talking to children about the meanings they construct from their literacy learning experiences prove especially useful. Capturing snapshots of meaning as the child engages in activity sheds light on what the child takes away from the instruction and classroom environment. The pilot studies (Brown, 2005; 2007)

suggest that even in the midst of a literacy-rich environment and excellent instruction, strugglers and succeeders construct meanings that are considerably different. This study seeks to further explore such perceptions, defined in this study as meaning-making moments in the course of activity, for what they suggest about differences between struggling and successful beginners. The ultimate goal is to inform and improve pedagogy.

Few studies have asked children about the meanings they construct as a result of instruction in learning to read. The studies that have examined the talk of young children as they engage in literacy-related activities have contributed much to our understanding of how the discursive practices of teachers, particularly when in conflict with the child's understandings about language, can impede, rather than help, the young learner (Cazden, 2001), and these studies have shown how instruction can be improved by simply understanding how children are viewing their own learning experiences (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

Purpose of the Study

This study is an effort to contribute to the current knowledge base on beginning readers, particularly those who struggle, by giving students of various ability levels an opportunity to voice the perceptions they have of what reading is and the meanings they construct as they participate in instructional activities. A review of the current research suggests that there is a need to see beginning reading instruction as it is experienced by the students themselves. A socioconstructivist frame suggests that beginning readers are not passive absorbers of information, but rather active, albeit novice participants in a community of practice. In addition, such a paradigm suggests that children's perceptions

are mediated not just by the immediate context of the classroom, as has been studied by others (Henk & Melnick, 1995; Kazelskis et al., 2004/2005) but also by the larger context of home and community (Heath, 1983). As such, their perspectives have the potential to yield valuable information that will help the classroom teacher to improve pedagogical practices by matching instruction to the student and the meanings s/he constructs.

The study includes four case studies of first grade students who are beginning readers, two successful and two struggling. The socioconstructivist lens informs both data collection and analysis. Discourse analysis is used as a frame for better understanding the meanings children construct and share through their discursive practices (Gee, 2005).

The questions that guide this research are:

3. How do beginning readers perceive the nature of reading?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?
4. What meanings do beginning readers construct from their literacy-learning experiences?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will explore what is known about beginning readers, and more specifically, what is known about why some beginners struggle and others succeed. The purpose is to inform a study designed to describe the perceptions of beginning readers, i.e., the way the beginner views his/her experiences, concerning:

- The nature of reading
- The literacy events that take place in the first-grade classroom

Beginning readers, and more specifically struggling beginning readers, have been viewed through many lenses over the past sixty years. Traditionally, learning to read was viewed as the acquisition of a set of subskills. Reading disability was viewed metaphorically as illness and the remedies were drawn from Skinnerian techniques designed to elicit an automatic response to a stimulus (Anderson & Fox, 2004). More recently, cognitive processing models of reading (Samuels, 1994; Stanovich, 1980) highlight the role of schema, i.e., a personal knowledge base (Samuels, 1994), and the ways in which the problems of beginning readers complicate themselves as the reader develops (Stanovich, 1980).

The common thread of these views of reading is a focus on the individual. Learning to read is viewed as a process that takes place primarily within the mind of the individual reader. Socioconstructivist perspectives on learning, which can be traced to the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, challenge the notion of learning being solely “in the head.” Vygotsky positioned learning, i.e., changes in thinking, within the context of meaningful social interactions. Neo-Vygotskian theorists have extended this thinking,

conceptualizing the classroom as a social construct and the learner as a novice in a community of shared practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Sociolinguists and family literacy researchers have linked such theories to literacy, challenging prevailing notions of reading difficulties as individually situated and prompting a more holistic, contextual look at strugglers (Clay, 1985; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

Although learning to read is widely acknowledged as socially situated and the reading process is viewed in its complexity as “developmental and anchored in a sociocultural context” (Anderson & Fox, 2004, p. 54), recent legislation (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001) along with the influence of the National Reading Panel Report (2000) have directed increased attention toward reading difficulties as a problem within the individual. Research citing the benefits of early intervention for reading difficulties (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) combined with the expectations associated with high-stakes testing have once again given rise to the notion of reading difficulties as illness to be treated by intense direct instruction geared toward the individual’s mastery of the sub-components of reading (Good & Kaminski, 2002).

With such complexities in mind, the literature was reviewed with the goal of finding out what is known about the differences between struggling and successful beginning readers. Multiple theoretical frames were explored in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the factors that complicate and facilitate learning to read; research was reviewed from three paradigms: 1) family and emergent literacy, 2) cognitive processing, and 3) metacognition. The goal of looking at these bodies of research is to better understand both individual and social factors that may affect the beginning reader. Before reviewing the literature though, I will begin with a theoretical

frame that: 1) views the language and thought of an individual as shaped by social and cultural experiences, 2) views literacy as social practice, and 3) defines reading as a meaning-making event.

Theoretical Framework

Language and Thought as a Social Construction

Today's classrooms are populated with students who are linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse. Even the youngest school students have already had countless experiences in their family and community that have helped to shape the way they use language and approach text. Most important, these experiences shape the way individuals understand their world. Vygotsky's concept of semiotic mediation provides a lens through which one can better understand the differences of learners within a classroom, particularly the needs of those who struggle with literacy learning. By examining Vygotsky's work on semiotic mediation and research which acknowledges the role of semiotic mediation in learning, one can better understand the potential sources of mismatch between students and their literacy instruction.

Vygotsky's Concept of Semiotic Mediation

Vygotsky's notion of semiotic mediation is rooted in the understanding that social interactions shape all thought, i.e., before a child can internalize an understanding and makes it his/her own, s/he must encounter the concepts in interaction with others. In contrasting Vygotsky's view of learning with Piaget, Woolfolk (1997) writes:

...Vygotsky (1978, 1986, 1987, 1993) suggested that cognitive development depends much more on interactions with the people in the child's world and the tools that the culture provides to support thinking. Children's knowledge, ideas, attitudes, and values develop through interaction with others (p. 44 as quoted in Tracey & Morrow, 2004, p. 108).

While Piaget doesn't discount the notion of peers contributing to learning, he posits that cognition changes in the context of the individual acting upon his/her environment. In contrast, Vygotsky views changes in thought as linked to the individual's interactions with others as s/he makes use of the cultural signs and tools available to him/her. In other words, the child's thinking is shaped as s/he engages others in his/her meaning-making.

Central to Vygotsky's theory is the notion that language is the most significant of all cultural signs and that language does not reflect thought but shapes it. As the child engages with other members of a cultural community, s/he comes to understand the semiotic nature of language and other signifiers within the culture, such as print.

"Learning to mean" through the semiotic tool of language

Semiotic understandings first begin to emerge through the use of pre-linguistic gestures and early language directed toward others who are socially significant to the child. At about the age of two, the child discovers the signifying function of language. According to Vygotsky, "... 'The greatest discovery of the child' becomes possible only when a certain relatively high level of thought and speech development has been reached. In other words, speech cannot be 'discovered' without thinking" (1986, p. 83).

Gesturing, such as pointing to an object to indicate that the object is wanted, is likely a precursor to semiotic mediation. The child learns to "mean" through gestures that signify his/her intentions. The baby who waves "bye-bye" is not intending the observer to notice his/her opening and closing fingers. Rather, the child's intent is to engage the individual in the shared meaning that the gesture signifies, such as impending separation.

Throughout the first years of life, the child's social contacts serve as the foundation for language, and hence thought, by creating the need to communicate and establish

relationships with others. As such, the genesis of semiotic mediation, the notion that a sign represents something beyond itself, is socially situated with language at the core.

Gesturing is followed by the use of one-word labels. Labeling is a critical stage in the emergence of semiotic mediation because as the child begins to label objects with linguistic referents, meanings are being constructed that inform all future understandings.

Vygotsky (1978) writes:

The child begins to perceive the world not only through his eyes but also through his speech. As a result, the immediacy of 'natural' perception is supplanted by a complex mediated process; as such, speech becomes an essential part of the child's cognitive development (p. 32).

This meeting of speech and thought causes a crossing of the two, resulting in the verbalization of thought and the rationalization of speech (Vygotsky, 1986).

The Shift from External to Internal Speech

Next, social speech yields the ability to direct speech inward. Semiotic understanding would be impossible were it not for the social context and the significant role of the caregiver. The child quickly discovers that he/she can engage others in meeting his/her needs and satisfying wants. Through speech, the child learns that he/she can appeal to a caregiver for help in solving a problem. Vygotsky states, "...the key to understanding forms of semiotic mediation on the intramental plane is to analyze their intermental origins, a point that is reflected in his claim that 'a sign is always originally a means used for social purposes, a means of influencing others, and only later becomes a means of influencing oneself'" (quoted in Wertsch, 1991, p. 34). The interactions between caregiver and child lay a critical foundation for the later use of self-directed or inner speech. As the child questions the caregiver, the caregiver fills in the gaps where the child's abilities fall short.

As these socially situated, linguistic exchanges take place over time, the child is eventually able to utilize language to direct his/her own thoughts and actions, rather than the merely the actions of the caregiver. In the absence of the caregiver's attention, the child directs his/her speech toward him/herself. Vygotsky explains that egocentric speech "...does not merely accompany the child's activity; it serves as mental orientation, conscious understanding; it helps in overcoming difficulties; it is speech for oneself, intimately and usefully connected with the child's thinking" (1986, p. 228). This self-directed speech forms the basis for the ability to plan and think beyond the present context, to a future, and as yet, unexperienced situation.

Whereas Piaget claims egocentric speech disappears, Vygotsky claims that this type of speech is transformed in a way that parallels the child's changing social needs. The child no longer needs the sounds of words to mediate his/her activity. Vygotsky (1986) writes:

"The decreasing vocalization of egocentric speech denotes a developing abstraction from sound, the child's new faculty to 'think words' instead of pronouncing them. This is the positive meaning of the sinking coefficient of egocentric speech. The downward curve indicates development toward inner speech," (p. 230).

The acquisition of inner speech results in important cognitive changes. Consistent with Vygotsky's contention that social and cultural practices shape individual thinking, he posits that intramental speech mirrors intermental interactions. According to Vygotsky, "egocentric speech...grows out of its social foundations by means of transferring social, collaborative forms of behavior to the sphere of the individual's psychological functioning'" (quoted in Wertsch, 1991, p. 34). When actions are mediated by inner speech, i.e., intramental functioning, rather than intermental interactions, the child becomes capable of actions that are intentional and planned rather than impulsive. S/he

can utilize language to regulate his/her own behavior, making choices about how to solve problems.

Language as a Mediational Means in Concept Formation: Spontaneous to Scientific

Vygotsky differentiates between spontaneous concept formation, i.e., the type of understanding that one acquires in the normal course of interaction within one's sociocultural context, and scientific concepts, i.e., those learned in a formal educational setting. Spontaneous concepts are initially context-bound, though the child learns to make connections between them (Wertsch, 1991). Scientific concepts are acquired via deliberate, systematic instruction, in the context of formal learning. According to Vygotsky, "...the development of concepts and the development of word meanings are one and the same process, it is by focusing on the systematic relationships between word meanings that instruction brings the semantic aspect of speech to conscious awareness. And this, in turn, enables the child to make the transition to a higher level of thinking" (quoted in Wells, 1994). The transition to higher level thinking is fostered by the decontextualized nature of the instruction. Only in school is the child required to distance his/her thinking from the actual context of the concept and form links between ideas, based upon categories that are abstract rather than concrete.

The acquisition of inner speech facilitates the development of higher level thinking and formal learning. Inner speech, which allows the child to abstract his/her thinking from the present context, make connections between concepts that are not simultaneously experienced, and plan ahead to solve problems in an intentional, goal-directed way, makes possible the ability to acquire scientific concepts through reading, writing, and discourse. The formal instructional setting (where scientific concepts are typically

acquired) limits students' opportunities to physically experience what is to be understood. Instead, the child is expected to construct an understanding by connecting ideas encountered through text and discussion to understandings that have been acquired spontaneously.

It is important to note, however, that spontaneous concepts, i.e., the informal learning the child has experienced outside of school, are powerful mediators of the acquisition of scientific or schooled learning. Spontaneous concepts are resilient and have the potential to complicate learning:

...many such misconceptions have been interpreted to result from implicit use of bottom-up, additive mechanisms in a situation where the new information has a different structure from existing knowledge...everyday knowledge stands in the way of understanding the new scientific explanatory framework (Vosniadou, 2007, p. 61).

Thus, family literacy practices, communities, and peer groups serve as powerful mediators in the development of the spontaneous concept formation, which ultimately mediates the development of scientific concepts.

To summarize, at the heart of the concept of semiotic mediation is the assumption that cultural and social practices, particularly the individual's interaction with the cultural signs in his/her environment, transform thinking. Two critical factors in the development of cognition are language and a social context which gives meaning to the interactions. Barton (1994) writes, "Language is a symbolic system linking what goes on inside our heads with what goes on outside. It mediates between self and society" (p. 46). Unlike a cognitive processing view of learning where language is viewed as for communication and as a reflection of thinking, a socioconstructivist view posits that language *is* thought, i.e., language creates and shapes knowledge (Barton, 1994; Vygotsky, 1986).

Literacy as Social Practice

Vygotsky's theory that sign systems such as language mediate how individuals think, act, and interact has been explored and extended in numerous ways. The work of Scribner & Cole (1981) confirmed that although differences in mental functioning due to sociocultural practices may not be dramatic, particular ways of using literacy result in particular ways of thinking. Traditionally, literacy has been viewed as a singular construct, i.e., a set of skills to be mastered. This notion of literacy as singular lends itself to a deficit model of reading failure, i.e., the child who comes to school without particular kinds of knowledge is at risk for reading failure.

In the 1960's research on patterns of communication, including language and literacy use outside of school challenged the notion of literacy as singular. Hull & Schultz (2002) write:

...Schools were portrayed as cultures organized around a set of values and beliefs that frequently were not shared by the students and surrounding communities in which they are located. A major finding of this research was that children socialized in different contexts come to school differently prepared to participate in school, which may result in school failure (p. 15).

Heath's (1983) seminal study of three southern communities painted a detailed portrait of such differences. Roadville, a rural, white, working-class community and Trackton, a Black, working-class community, engaged their children in different types of literacy practices. For example, Heath explains how each community practices the retelling of events:

The one kind of story Trackton prides itself on is the "true story," one in which the basis of the plot is a real event, but the details and even the outcome are exaggerated to such an extent that the story is ultimately anything but true to the facts. Boys excel in telling these stories and use them to establish and maintain status relations...the purpose is to entertain (p. 187-188).

In contrast, Heath notes that Roadville “stories” are “narratives characterized by a factual detailing of temporal and spatial descriptions and recounting of conversations by direct quotation” (p. 153). Although the Roadville way of using language was closer in some respects to the expectations for school uses of language, only the children of the townspeople, whose middle-class “ways with words” were privileged in the schools, proved to maintain long-term academic success.

Heath’s work is important for what it suggests about the power of community literacy practices to mediate in-school learning, and for what it suggests about the potential of understanding out-of-school literacy practices as a means of informing instruction as it takes place inside the walls of the classroom. Equally important, however, the work is important for what it suggests about the privileging of schooled literacy over out-of-school uses of reading, writing, and communicating.

New Literacy Studies (NLS)

Street (1984; 1995) argues that literacy is often too narrowly defined, particularly in schools, where literacy is viewed as a set of skills. Street’s work among Iranian cultural groups suggests that those considered illiterate by the dominant culture were, in reality, quite capable of literate practices as embedded in their every day activities. Street’s notion of viewing literacy not as a singular construct but as “multiliteracies” leads not only to an emphasis on purpose and context, but to the importance of seeing literacy as embedded in everyday activities that serve a purpose beyond the goal of literacy for its own sake (Hull & Schultz, 2002). According to Hull & Schultz (2002):

Their (NLS researchers’) findings can be summed up by their central term—*multiliteracies*—that signals multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and the increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity (p. 26).

However, viewing literacy through such a lens should not result in the notion of context as a boundary that confines particular practices to particular places, but rather that literacy understandings are fluid, with practices from one context seeping into the other (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Rowsell, 2006; Street & Street, 1991). The New Literacy Studies shift the focus from the individual to the interaction between individuals and from the classroom to home, community, work, *and* school. When out-of-school literacy practices are acknowledged and valued, the struggling beginning reader is not seen as deficient, but as having “funds of knowledge” that beg to be understood for what they suggest about the learner and his/her literacy development.

Funds of Knowledge

Moll (1992) coined the term “funds of knowledge” which he defined as “the networked expertise woven through community practices (Hull & Shultz, 2002, p. 34). Moll’s work with Latino communities in the Southwest is important for what it suggests about the ways classrooms and communities can be linked when the literate practices of community members are acknowledged, valued, and brought into the classroom. Moll’s work illustrates the value of creating permeable boundaries between in-school and out-of-school literacy learning.

In contrast to Moll’s intentional “bringing in” of out-of-school literacy practices, Dyson (1993) focuses on showing how children spontaneously “bring their outside worlds into the classroom through their writing and the oral performances that encircle literacy events” (Hull & Schultz, 2002, p. 35). Dyson’s study of young writers in an urban primary school documents how children from diverse backgrounds draw upon their out of school experiences as they find their way into print. The children in Dyson’s study

utilized their knowledge of speaking, drawing, playing, storytelling, and print experiences to construct understandings about a medium that was new to them—schooled literacy.

Dyson frames her study with an assumption about children as experienced and intentional meaning-sharers:

From infancy on, we as human beings are remarkably social (Bruner, 1986). Indeed, a young child's developing sense of *self* is characterized by an expanding sense of how to share experiences with others (Stern, 1985). This sharing includes first offerings of invented symbolic forms (e.g., playful actions, drawings, songs) and early social comments... We work to create more intimate, more particular worlds that capture some aspect of the experiences we share with other people. The human urge is fundamental... for understanding and being understood (p. 11).

Like other NLS researchers and theorists, Dyson brings to her study an acknowledgement of the rich heritage children bring with them to the classroom--their ways of using the resources available to them, including but not limited to language. Her findings suggest that children do not leave their out-of-school worlds at home, but rather that they juxtapose the official world of the classroom with the unofficial worlds of out-of-school experiences, sometimes in complex ways. For example, Jameel brought his performative skills to bear on his story writing to create a new "text" in the school environment. Such texts, according to Dyson, have the potential to bridge the gap between the official world of school and the unofficial world of the community. Dyson contends that teachers would do well to "create social situations that support children's entry into new ways of using language" (p. 219).

Kress (1997/2000) explores the many paths young children take as they find their way into print. He contends that thinking occurs along each pathway, but that different modes (e.g., drawing, writing, production and use of physical objects) facilitate different ways of making meaning. He writes:

It matters therefore, inasmuch as there may be a choice, what stuff they engage with, for its structure will set the context of their transformative action. Children's interests act as a device for selecting such materials... These selections, however unsystematic they may look, will lead nevertheless along a particular path; and because 'interest' in this individually made and socially formed whole, each individual's path will be different, however slightly so. And so each child's path into literacy will be differently made, even though the appearance is one of relative uniformity as the end result (p. 144).

Like Dyson, Kress argues that children should be provided with the opportunities to draw upon and further develop their preferred mode of meaning-making, while developing the abilities to use other modalities as well.

Although researchers in the NLS tradition have explored the fluidity between out-of-school and in-school literacy contexts, Marsh's work suggests that resistance to such bridge-building efforts exists (2006). Marsh (2004) argues that the privileging of a canon of literature in the primary curriculum marginalizes the types of texts preferred by some children.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

The New Literacy Studies posit that literacy is embedded in the context of every day activities both in and out of school. Although Vygotsky's theory of semiotic mediation is helpful in conceptualizing the importance of contextual factors on the development of thought and language, he says little about the specifics of what context does to mediate learning. In contrast to situating learning in the mind of the individual as Piaget does, those who have extended Vygotsky's work situate learning in co-participation structures (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where "...knowledge is created and re-created between people" (Wells, 2000, p. 67). This implies that not only are learners active participants rather than passive vessels waiting to be filled with information, but, more important, "...it [learning] is mediated by the differences of perspective among co-participants" (Lave &

Wenger, 1991, p. 15). Viewing a classroom from this perspective shifts the focus from the ideas that a teacher is communicating to the meanings children as learners perceive.

Beginning learners can be seen as novices who are “learning to walk the walk and talk the talk” of from a more experienced and capable member of a community of shared practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualize this apprenticeship as Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP). “Peripheral” does not imply that the beginner is sitting idly on the sidelines; on the contrary, he/she can gain access at many entry points:

...Newcomers’ legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an “observational” lookout post: It crucially involves *participation* as a way of learning—of both absorbing and being absorbed in—the “culture of practice.” An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95).

According to Lave & Wenger (1991), making the community of practice accessible to all newcomers is critical; they argue that interactions with all members of the community, including other novices and those who are more knowledgeable, access to resources, and the opportunity to fully participate in activities of the group are keys to “full-fledged membership.”

Language is, of course, central to full participation, and it is important to clarify that in contrast to cognitive processing perspectives of learning, language is viewed as a tool for constructing knowledge, not just reflecting it. Thus, language is activity rather than reflection on activity. Lee & Smagorinsky (2000) write:

The interplay between the novice and the more expert other(s) is negotiated through language and the use of artifacts. Thus, the expert must consider the semiotic tool of language through which both parties communicate ideas and understandings and in which forms of relevant prior knowledge are couched (p. 6).

Shared understandings (which are socially and culturally constructed) are essential to the expert's ability to clarify misconceptions and to help the novice co-construct new meanings.

Barton (1994) extends the work of Lave & Wenger (1991), applying the theory specifically to literacy as a social practice. Barton argues that when this notion of language as a semiotic tool is extended to literacy, the gap between the social and psychological aspects of learning is bridged:

...it [literacy] is a system for representing the world to ourselves—a psychological phenomenon; at the same time it is a system for representing the world to others—a social phenomenon... This view of literacy starts, then, from everyday events... A literacy event is also embedded in our mental life; it forms and is formed by our awareness, intentions, and actions (pp. 33-35).

Barton refers to such a view of literacy as an “ecological view;” i.e., the relationship between the individual and his/her environment as they participate in literacy events is dynamic and inseparable.

Most important, perhaps, to a discussion of beginning literacy learners, is Barton's (1994) claim that “particular ways of using language are ways of structuring knowledge and relationships” (p. 56). For decades, literacy researchers have analyzed classroom talk as a means to examine how the linguistic habits of teachers can complicate the language development of children. Research in the area of discourse analysis has documented how the patterns of language valued in schools may not match the young learner's home and community language patterns. Given these understandings, early literacy learning must be especially sensitive to children's ways of talking, being, and thinking at home and in school.

Members of a community of shared practice, including the classroom, communicate through many means. Spoken language, i.e., “discourse,” is but one of the ways. Gee (2005) argues, however, that discourse or “language-in-use” is often combined with gestures, expressions, clothing, behaviors, values, and beliefs in order to take on a particular role in a community of practice and enact a specific identity in that community; this he refers to as “Discourse”. Just as the woman who walks up to a store clerk to ask for information is utilizing language as a member of a community of practice, so is the child who sits in the first grade classroom asking a question of his/her teacher. Neither the woman nor the first grader utilizes speech alone, however, to accomplish his/her purposes. Gee (2005) explains:

...it is not enough to get the words ‘right,’ though that is crucial. It is also necessary to get one’s body, clothes, gestures, actions, interactions, symbols, tools, technologies (be they guns or graphs), values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions ‘right,’ as well, and at all the ‘right’ places and times (p. 7).

These language users adopt a tone of voice and use gestures and eye contact that they deem appropriate. The non-speech “stuff” of these interactions is a product of the individuals’ social and cultural conditioning. Conceptualizing the mind as a “pattern organizer,” and “constructor”, Gee states:

...thinking and using language is an *active* matter of *assembling* the situated meanings that you need for action in the world. The assembly is always relative to one’s socioculturally defined experiences in the world and, *more or less*, routinized (‘normed’) through Discourse models and various social practices of the Discourses to which you belong (p. 67).

In summary, from a socioconstructivist frame, literacy is not literacy, but rather literacies, rooted in the use of language to make meaning. Ways of using language, and hence ways of thinking, are mediated by and embedded in every day practices of a cultural community.

Defining Reading as a Meaning-Making Event

Viewing literacy as a socially mediated practice implies that the reader's meaning-making is central to the process of reading. In contrast to more traditional views of reading as extracting information from text, Rosenblatt (2005) conceptualizes reading as a transaction. She explains that the transaction between reader and text results in an evocation of meaning; however, each (text and reader) acts upon the other, culminating in a novel experience with each act of reading (Rosenblatt, 2005). Echoing Rosenblatt (2005) Barton (1994) explains the "reading event" this way:

...the reader is always bringing their own meanings and these will also mediate their understanding of the text. Meaning is located in the interaction between writer, reader and text. There is not in fact a meaning *in the text*, there are only the meanings which a reader *takes from the text*. In addition, very commonly the reader has their own purposes... (p. 68).

Consistent with Lave & Wenger's (1991) view that learning is "a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind," Rosenblatt (2005) and Barton (1994) see meaning in reading as an event that occurs not in the mind of the reader nor in the text but in the transaction between the two. But while Lave & Wenger's focus is on the learner as a community member, Rosenblatt and Barton, drawing upon socio-constructivist notions of language development, foreground the reader as an individual whose meaning-making is mediated by socio-cultural experiences.

Neither Rosenblatt nor Barton focuses on the beginning reader, but consistent with their views of reading as a meaning-making event, both see the beginner as a constructor of meaning whose thinking has been shaped by his/her social and cultural interactions. This view of beginning reading suggests a complexity that is ignored by those who see learning to read as the acquisition of a set of skills. Barton (1994) acknowledges the role

of skills in reading, particularly when dealing with an individual case, but views skills as inseparable from literacy practices and not necessarily transferrable. He states, “One approach may be to see skills as situated within practices. This goes back to Scribner & Coles’ formulation that skills are located within practices, and that the practices determine the skills” (p. 165). Scribner & Cole (1981) state:

By a practice we mean a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge. We use the term ‘skills’ to refer to the co-coordinated sets of actions involved in applying this knowledge in particular settings. A practice, then, consists of three components: technology, knowledge and skills...All practices share interrelated tasks that share common tools, knowledge base, and skills (p. 236, as quoted in Barton, 1994, p. 165).

Consistent with this view of skills as embedded in practice, Rosenblatt (2005) voices concern about the separation of skills from the practice of making meaning:

...[Essential] is a sufficiently rich experience to make the words into meaningful signs, pointing to things and ideas. The queer black shapes must not only come to have sounds attached to them; these sounds must also be related to the appropriate object or idea...The beginning reader, then, should bring to the printed symbols a certain fund of experience with life and language. And the reading materials offered to the youngster should bring him verbal symbols that can be linked with experience...There is a continual shuttling back and forth between words and past experience and newly crystallized understanding. But how easily this web of relationships can be broken, and the habit of mere verbalization fasten itself on the child! (pp. 64-65).

The view of reading as a meaning-making event contrasts with more traditional, cognitive perspectives of reading, where the act of reading involves two separate entities, reader and text, with the text serving as a visual stimulus which begins the input process (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). If the reader successfully processes the visual stimuli, the author’s message is decoded and comprehension results as a byproduct of the process. The reader’s role is that of processor of encoded information. In contrast, both

Rosenblatt and Barton view the reading process as a complex event in which all entities, reader, text, and context are dynamically related.

Rosenblatt's Transactional View of Reading is distinguished from traditional views of reading in several respects. Each reader is unique and an active constructor of meaning rather than a passive recipient or a processor of information. The text, rather than being a vessel containing information to be extracted or a visual stimulus, is semiotic in nature, its meaning mediated by the social and cultural understandings of the reader, i.e., ways of understanding language and meanings attached to text. The nature of meaning is that of a unique evocation rather than a fixed entity which can be conceptualized in the mind of the writer and duplicated in the mind of the reader.

To summarize, the theoretical framework of this study is comprised of three key ideas: 1) a Vygotskian view of language and thought as mediated by social interactions, 2) the notion of literacy as a social practice and literacy-learning as mediated by the learner's ways of using language, and 3) reading as a meaning-making event, involving the reader and all that s/he brings to the reading situation, the text, and the context.

Review of the Literature on Struggling and Successful Emergent Readers

Though this study will view learning to read from a socioconstructivist frame, three research paradigms have been reviewed: 1) family and emergent literacy, 2) cognitive processing, and 3) metacognition. These frames have critical differences but each contributes to a broad picture of the factors that may complicate or facilitate reading for the beginner. First, I will discuss recent government initiatives that have influenced both research and practice with regard to beginning readers, and then I will discuss what is

known about struggling and successful beginners with regard to family literacy practices, emergent literacy development, cognitive processing factors, and metacognition.

Results of Federal Research Reports about Critical Components of How Young Children

Learn to Read

The government has taken an increasing interest in the literacy development of young children. As a result, several comprehensive, government-sponsored reports have influenced both research and instructional practice regarding struggling readers. First, Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) led a team of experts from a broad range of literacy-related fields that was charged by the U.S. Department of Education to "...provide an integrated picture of how reading develops and how reading instruction should proceed" (p. vi). According to the report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), reading ability results from a dynamic interaction of both experiential and biological/cognitive factors. The researchers conclude that nearly all children can learn to read; however, genetic deficits, such as those related to phonological processing can cause the process to be more difficult. According to the report, children at risk for reading difficulties include those with cultural and linguistic differences, minority groups, and those of low socioeconomic status. The researchers concluded that while poor instruction is usually overcome with a change in the educational context, the effects of poor first grade instruction may affect a child for years to come. They also noted the importance of early intervention for reading difficulties.

Soon after Snow, Burns, & Griffin's study, The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) presented their report, which was commissioned by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. This built upon and expanded the work of Snow,

Burns, & Griffin's team. The NRP Report, though limited in that its recommendations ignored both correlational and qualitative data (Allington, 2005), was designed to assess the current research base with an eye toward improving classroom reading instruction. The report identified five key areas as central to reading achievement: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. The first of these five areas, phonemic awareness, has become particularly predominant in the current literature on struggling beginners.

Profiling the struggling reader is not a simple task, however. Strugglers differ from successful readers in many and varied ways, and although the government sponsored reports considered both biological and experiential factors affecting literacy development, Gee (2001b) argues that literacy is defined too narrowly and literacy skills are viewed as something that can be viewed apart from their use. The notions of the "good reader" as one who is successful with most texts in most circumstances, and the "poor reader" as one who is rarely successful making sense of text are viewed as fictions by theorists who view literacy as practice that is situated in ways of using language (Barton, 1994; Gee, 2001b). Interpreting the current literature base on struggling and successful readers necessitates the understanding that "reading" is most often not defined this broadly by researchers, but exploring the literature from theoretical frames other than a socio-constructivist perspective is necessary to better understand the reader factors, the textual factors, and the contextual factors that may hinder beginners.

The Struggling Beginning Reader

Situating Strugglers: Family Literacy Practices Common among Struggling Beginners

Historically, the importance of the family in literacy learning emerged as behavioral learning theories receded in the 60's. According to Family Literacy Theory, the home environment and literacy practices of a child's family mediate literacy learning in important ways (Tracey & Morrow, 2004). Children are viewed as entering school not with "empty backpacks" waiting to be filled, but with strong notions of how linguistic elements work together to convey meaning. Ways of using language in the family (Cazden, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1995) and in the larger community (Heath, 1983) have been shown to shape the way children speak and the way they approach print in various forms, and may ultimately affect their ability to succeed as beginning readers, particularly in school. According to Purcell-Gates (2000), "...what young children learn about written language before schooling is constrained by the ways in which important others in their families and social communities use print" (p. 855). Purcell-Gates (2000) challenges the conclusions of other family literacy researchers who proposed that nearly all children who grow up in a literate society have adequate exposure to print; she argues that the ways in which print mediates the daily experiences of a child's family is a more significant factor affecting beginning literacy learning than oral language or other factors commonly thought to be important to a child's success.

Mismatching assumptions. Purcell-Gates' (1995) study of an illiterate Appalachian mother and her young son who was a struggling beginning reader illuminates the ways in which print may or may not mediate a family's daily activities. Purcell-Gates notes a poignant example of sending the family a postcard from England. The postcard had a photo that the researcher was sure would capture the attention and interest of the young boy and his family. However, when Purcell-Gates inquired about whether or not it had

been received, the mother had only a vague recollection that it had, in fact, come. Mail, even a picture postcard, was not viewed as a means of receiving interesting messages from friends. Purcell-Gates also relates an anecdote about Donny's use of writing materials that had been provided for the family. Purcell-Gates had assumed that if pens, pencils, and markers were made available—that is, if the environment were enriched--the child would begin to engage in literate activities. Instead, the researcher found that the child utilized the writing implements as pretend fishing poles. The researcher and the mother-son dyad clearly differed in their assumptions about the uses of literacy, and such differences led to Donny's difficulties in understanding the utility of literacy instruction he received as a first grader, such as phonics. Donny apparently did not understand that inherent in print was encoded meaning; hence, phonics—an important key to cracking the code—meant little.

Like Purcell-Gates' study, Gallas & Smagorinsky (2002) chronicle Gallas', a classroom teacher's, interactions with Denzel, a Native American student. Through interviews with this otherwise capable student who struggled with beginning reading, Gallas became aware of the mismatch between her own culturally-based assumptions about reading and those that her students brought to the classroom. Denzel viewed reading as a process of decoding; books were simply a tool for practicing the skill of recognizing words, not a tool for understanding or creating an imaginary world for enjoyment. As a result, this student, who was successful with beginning decoding skills, showed no interest in read-aloud times or book discussions. Gallas and Smagorinsky explain, "Texts and contexts are encoded at many levels. Reading words on a page suggests little about how those words got there, why someone would want to read them,

or what perspectives might be available to interpret them” (p. 56). The researchers conclude that the problem for many struggling readers is not that they are unable to decode the words, but rather that they are unable to decode the context in which the reading takes place; i.e., the child may not understand that the reading aloud of a fantasy story calls for the listener to utilize the textual description to recreate a story scene within the mind.

Gallas and Smagorinsky (2002) suggest that teachers strive to discover the “literacy narratives” that students bring to school. According to Gallas and Smagorinsky, the literacy narrative is more than background knowledge about a topic; scripts can also suggest appropriate ways of engaging with various kinds of text. For example, a child who has been read to frequently may bring to the read-aloud situation an understanding that the words and pictures in books help us to imagine the story world. He/she may also anticipate some of the kinds of questions a teacher is likely to ask as the story is read. But a child who has not had such experiences may not interpret literacy contexts as a teacher expects.

Socioeconomic factors. It has been widely established that students of low socioeconomic status (SES) are at greater risk for reading failure than middle or high SES students (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998); however, the reasons for this are complex. Low SES may be linked to poor educational opportunities for both students and parents and poor health (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In addition, children from lower income families have been shown to have patterns of interaction that differ from those widely used in schools (Heath, 1983), and the quality of interactions, specifically in the vocabulary children are exposed to, creates an ever-widening language gap between

children of different SES groups (Hart & Risley, 1995; 2003). When viewed from a Vygotskian perspective, the implications of this research take on added importance, as language used in the home is not simply a means of communication, but a mediator of thought (Vygotsky, 1985).

The Struggling Emergent Reader

Traditionally, learning to read was viewed from a “readiness” perspective. This is to say that, in general, learning to read was assumed to begin with formal schooling. The child was taught requisite skills, such as letter recognition, basic sight words, and how to hold a pencil. In contrast, Emergent Literacy Theory views the child as a literacy learner from birth, with the learning of listening, speaking, reading, and writing intertwined (Morrow, 2005). Some researchers on emergent literacy, particularly those with backgrounds in psychology, isolate specific skills needed to process print. These studies are valuable for what they suggest about decoding difficulties as experienced by some young learners

Letter knowledge. The child who enters school not knowing the letters of the alphabet has less chance of success in learning to read than his/her peers who come to school with this knowledge (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Speece & Ritchey (2005) found that letter naming fluency not only predicted initial success in beginning reading skills, but also predicted the rate at which students made gains in oral reading fluency through second grade. It is somewhat puzzling that letter-naming is a better predictor of decoding skills than letter-sound knowledge. Perhaps letter-naming, which resembles the linguistic task of labeling objects, is more abstract than letter-sound knowledge; if this is

a more code-related skill than knowing letter-sounds, then it may be a more critical skill to beginning reading than knowing letter sounds.

Language experiences. Though strong correlational evidence for the influence of oral language on beginning reading skills exists (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Pikulski & Tobin, 1989), Purcell-Gates (2004), writing from a socially-situated perspective, challenges the oral language deficit hypothesis. She claims that experiences with writing are far more critical in beginning reading skill acquisition than oral language proficiency. Purcell-Gates' research on kindergarten children's understandings of the differences between oral and written registers of language suggests that knowledge of the written register was only understood by those who had been read to frequently. Studies of pretend reading tasks indicate that prior to formal literacy instruction, children who are not read to frequently cannot decontextualize written language, whereas, middle-class children who had been read to frequently had this ability. Purcell-Gates concludes "...these data suggest the operative difference between the well-read-to and low-SES children lies in the written language sphere and not in the oral one" (p. 110). Purcell-Gates argues that the directionality of understanding is from written to oral rather than vice-versa.

Purcell-Gates' claims are supported by Storch and Whitehurst (2002) who distinguish between oral language and code-related precursors to literacy development; code-related precursors include print conventions, beginning forms of writing (such as name writing), alphabet naming, and letter-sound correspondence; i.e., those which have distinct semiotic functions. The researchers found that when comparing code-related skills in Head Start children to oral language skills in kindergarten, the code-related skills had a

stronger effect on Grade 1 reading ability, Grade 2 reading ability, Grade 3-4 reading accuracy, and Grade 3-4 comprehension.

Poor use of linguistic cueing systems. Strugglers seem to have difficulty utilizing the cueing systems that good readers (usually without conscious attention) draw upon, such as graphophonic (print), syntax, or context cues. Some poor readers tend to rely on one cueing system, rather than cross-checking, as good readers do (Clay, 1982), Stanovich (1986) notes that strugglers tend to utilize graphophonic cues slowly, incompletely, and sometimes inaccurately; other strugglers utilize multiple cueing systems, but do so inconsistently and inefficiently (Roller, Forsyth & Fielding (1998/1999).

The effects of curriculum on the emergent reader. Viewing the beginning reader as a “sense-maker” who is influenced by his/her social and cultural experiences, Dahl & Freppon (1995) sought to determine what meanings beginning readers made of their instruction. By engaging the children in talk about their learning, Dahl & Freppon found that students’ ability to apply phonics learning varied with their understandings of written text. This is consistent with findings indicating that out-of-school literacy practices with print (Purcell-Gates, 1995) and family beliefs about literacy (Gallas & Smagorinsky, 2002) complicated in-school literacy learning for some children.

Other factors affecting instruction for emergent readers. Behaviors indicative of a lack of engagement are often observed in students who experience a lack of success in literacy tasks. Ashcroft (2004) found that the struggler engaged in many off-task behaviors, such as looking at the researcher’s face rather than words on the page, attending to other stimuli in the room when not provided with unknown words, and fidgeting. The struggler may not be the only one to blame for disengagement, however.

Teachers have been found to engage strugglers in fewer actual reading tasks during instructional time (Gambrell, Wilson, & Gantt, 1981) and to interact with strugglers in ways that encourage him/her to disengage from the reading process (Dayton-Sakari, 1997).

The developing identity of a struggling reader. While Clay (1998) traces the many pathways through which beginners find their way into print, Stage Theorists contend that there is one pathway along which most proficient readers travel (Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1991; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998). According to Spear-Swerling & Sternberg (1998), as strugglers go off-course, they "...do not remain frozen in time at a particular phase but, rather, have other experiences that are mostly negative" (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998, p. 121). A struggling beginner's identity as a literacy learner, i.e., as a struggling reader, may affect subsequent literacy learning. Strugglers may develop a negative self-concept, which has been shown to correlate with reading difficulties (Chapman & Tunmer, 2003), whereas, a positive self-concept has been shown to correlate with success in reading (Aunola, Liskinen, Onatsu-Arvilommi & Nurmi, 2002).

Strugglers may begin with rather common sources of difficulty, but the difficulties experienced by the reader may take many forms as he/she grows older. Cognitive and experiential deficits, as well as instructional experiences, dynamically interact in the life of the struggling reader (Stanovich, 1986; Vellutino et al., 1996), resulting in profiles that by the end of the primary years may cause strugglers to have rather diverse areas of difficulty (Valencia & Buly, 2004).

The Struggler and the Reading Process

A cognitive processing frame foregrounds the unobservable mental processes a reader uses to make sense of text as it is visually perceived. Research from this paradigm sheds light on the many factors that can interfere with the reading process (Tracey & Morrow, 2004). It is well-established that beginning readers who have difficulty often continue to struggle (Juel, 1988; Speece & Ritchey, 2005). Stanovich (1986) theorized that the difficulties encountered by children early in the process of learning to read may compound themselves. He referred to this as the Mark Effect; the “poor”, i.e., the struggling beginners, get poorer (Stanovich, 1986). In a longitudinal study of the oral reading fluency of 276 young children, Speece & Ritchey (2005) found that first-graders who were identified as at-risk in the fall of first grade on letter-sound fluency measures read fewer than half as many words per minute as their not-at-risk peers. Even more interesting was the finding that the rate of progress for the at-risk students was half that of their peers. Speece & Ritchey (2005) also report that the growth rate of first grade readers was a predictor of second grade growth and success in oral reading fluency. Spira, Backen, & Fischel (2005)’s study of 146 low income first graders supports this finding. In their study of children who scored below the 30th percentile in first grade reading achievement measures, the researchers found that “...at each successive grade level, scores on the reading composite became more predictive of future reading scores” (p. 227).

The hallmark of struggling readers: Phonological deficits. Stanovich (1986) theorized that the causes of reading disability in its most basic sense may be less varied than previously thought; the differences in struggling readers may be more the result of the many and varied effects of reading failure and the ways in which these effects are

compounded by other factors within the reader, his or her experiences, and the instructional context. Stanovich (1986) hypothesized that the primary cause of breakdown in the reading process was rooted in phonological deficits, which he concluded was, in fact, a trait common to poor readers (1988). Though the common perception of dyslexia (i.e., severe word reading difficulty) is that of a visual problem, the research suggests that reading difficulties are less often caused by visual deficits than phonological deficits (Vellutino et al, 1996). Numerous studies provide support for phonological awareness as an important component of and predictor of early reading skill acquisition (Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel Report, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Speece, Mills, Ritchey, & Hillman, 2003; Vellutino, et al, 1996; Wagner, Torgeson, Rashotte, Hecht, Barker, Burgess, Donahue, & Garon, 1997). However, phonological awareness as a predictor of future success is limited (Leppanen, Niemi, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2004; Roth, Speece & Cooper, 2002; Speece & Ritchey, 2005). While it may seem intuitive that phonological sensitivity and the ability to manipulate the sounds of words facilitates the mapping of sounds onto letters, the role that phonological deficits play in beginning reading difficulties may be more complex than originally thought (Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax & Perney, 2003).

To summarize, cognitive processing models of reading suggest that the difficulties of struggling readers appear to originate from relatively few sources, the most common being phonological deficits; it appears that difficulties encountered early on in the process of learning to read interact with other factors, and have the potential to quickly become compounded and differentiated. Emergent Literacy and Family Literacy theorists, however, view the process of learning to read as intertwined with the child's language

and literacy experiences since birth, contending that the home environment is a powerful mediator that sometimes complicates literacy learning in school.

The Successful Beginner

Situating Succeeders: Family Literacy Practices Common among Successful Beginners

Parental influence. Research on family literacy practices suggests that the literacy practices of parents can have a significant impact on the success of a beginning reader (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2005). Milner's (1951) study of high achievers had home environments that included a more literacy-rich environment than low achievers. A seminal study by Durkin (1966) on the long-term success of early readers suggests that parents play a key role in encouraging children to engage in "paper and pencil" activities. However, Neuman (2004) found that children from poor families (none of whom displayed significant effort in helping the child to read) were equally capable of becoming early readers when a child care center "stood in the gap", providing a literacy-rich environment and experiences. Neuman (2004) also found that success in beginning reading was related to skill development, not intelligence; this finding is consistent with recent work by Petrill, Deater-Deckard, Thompson, DeThorne & Schatschneider (2006).

Match between home and school literacy uses. Not only is environment important, but the beliefs parents hold about literacy have been found to play a role in children's success (Baker & Scher, 2002). Heath's (1983) study of three Southern communities indicates that students whose literacy practices and values at home match with the practices and values exercised in the classroom are more successful than those who experience a mismatch. The children of the townspeople, who engaged their children in games of "What if", asked open-ended questions, and facilitated connections between

home experiences and school learning, were more successful at school literacy learning than those of the communities where literacy values included practices such as embellishing a story to engage an audience or focusing on minute details rather than global ideas.

Successful Emergent Readers

Intelligence. Until recently, reading disabilities were diagnosed in part by a discrepancy between an intelligence quotient (IQ) measure and achievement in reading and related areas. Though an acknowledgement that factors such as instruction and sociocultural background may render such discrepancy measures invalid, the fact that some children with IQ's in the normal to high range fail to learn to read well suggests that intelligence alone is an insufficient criterion for success (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

General language development. Huba & Ramisetty-Mikler (1995) found that early readers outperform nonreaders in language ability. Although the early readers in this study were not found to be a homogeneous group in terms of their decoding abilities, the data suggests that language ability may enable the child to profit from his/her experiences in such a way that s/he develops an understanding of the communicative nature of reading and writing which helps the child to understand that he/she must decode text in order to gain meaning. The findings suggest that not all early readers utilize the alphabetic principle, yet they do maintain their advantage over nonreaders at least through second grade. This finding supports Stanovich's (1980) interactive model of reading; he states, "...when coupled with the assumption that the various component subskills of reading can operate in a compensatory manner, leads to a reconceptualization

of the nature of deficiencies in reading...a process at any level can compensate for deficiencies at any other level” (p. 35-36). So, for example, according to this model, a beginning reader’s deficiency in decoding may be compensated for by a reader’s ability to predict a word based upon context.

Oral language. According to Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998), children from homes with a higher quantity of verbal interactions are more likely to be successful literacy learners than those from homes with fewer interactions, regardless of the quality of the interactions. While clear links between oral language and success in beginning reading have been established (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Pikulski & Tobin, 1989) and may seem intuitive, the significance of the relationship may not be fully understood. For example, one way that vocabulary may affect the beginning literacy learner is in developing phonemic sensitivity (Goswami, 2001; Wagner et al., 1997). Ruddell & Ruddell (1995) conclude that language and literacy develop in a parallel and interactive manner and that children’s drive to construct meaning is mediated by their understanding of the rule systems governing language. In that sense, oral language has the potential to impact both decoding and comprehension (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995; Morrow, 2005).

Spira, Bracken, & Fischel (2005) found that having relative strength in linguistic skills, such as phonological awareness, oral language, print knowledge, and letter-word identification, as well as the absence of classroom behavior problems in kindergarten predicted who would eventually succeed, in spite of initial difficulties in decoding, which suggests that the interaction of critical factors appears to be more important to success than the presence or absence of particular traits.

The relationship between language and cognitive growth. Cognitive development, as assessed by performance in Piagetian concrete operational tasks, has been found to correlate with the level of success in beginning reading (Polk & Goldstein, 1980), though the reason for the correlation is somewhat unclear. A study by Roberts (1992), who investigated the ways in which a child's emerging concept of "word" paralleled his/her cognitive growth, suggests a dynamic relationship between cognitive and linguistic development. A child's tacit awareness of word appears to mediate performance on explicit word tasks with a dynamic interaction in word concept and cognitive development. Importantly, not only does the child's growing cognitive ability mediate his/her ability to learn about language, but the new understandings about language appear to transform cognition.

Play preferences. Lending support to the notion that children's literacy learning begins at birth, Thomas (1984) found that successful and struggling readers differed in their play preferences throughout early childhood. The findings suggest that prior to formal reading instruction, successful beginners have many more years of experience interacting with print than their less successful peers.

The Succeeder and the Reading Process

According to a Stage Model view of literacy learning, proficient reading typically develops in predictable stages, which have been summarized by Spear-Swerling & Sternberg (1998) as beginning with visual cue word recognition (Ehri, 1991), during which it becomes important to develop and utilize phonological information and letter-sound knowledge to map sounds onto print and moving to automatic word recognition as

orthographic knowledge increases, with the goal being, fluent, strategic reading that results in the construction of meaning from text.

While struggling readers' difficulties become more complex, successful readers seem to profit from their own advancement in the process of becoming literate. In many aspects of language learning, children appear to progress by "bootstrapping"; i.e., what is learned facilitates further learning, and, in effect, the learner "pulls himself up by his own bootstraps". Clay (1982) notes that proficient readers learn to enhance their own abilities by engaging in a cross-checking process, utilizing multiple cueing systems which are compared with context cues (the primary cueing source) as they strive to make sense of text—something poor readers fail to do.

Overall, successful beginners appear to be children who, perhaps as a result of overall language ability, are able to profit from their own success and their experiences. Unlike strugglers, they engage with language, both spoken and written, from their earliest days, and most importantly, they seem to attend to linguistic cues in ways that strugglers do not. The impetus for this engagement may come from the child's own preferences, from parents, and/or care givers. Most important, of those who succeed in early literacy learning, only 5%-10% struggle later (Scarborough, 2001).

Metacognitive and Metalinguistic Awareness

Developmental Capabilities

Metacognition is defined by Flavell (1979), an early researcher on the topic, as an awareness of thinking that can be utilized to solve a problem. According to Tracey & Morrow (2004), "The concept of metacognition, when applied to the field of reading, contributes to a constructivist understanding of how reading comprehension occurs..."

(p. 61). While early research on metacognition suggested that true metacognitive awareness was not developed until adolescence (Baker & Brown, 1984), more recent work indicates that even though the metacognitive abilities of young children are limited, improvements occur with maturation and schooling (Flavell, Green, Flavell, & Grossman, 1997), and even preschool age children are capable of exhibiting metacognition on some level (Cox, 1994; Werner, 2000).

The Metacognitive Abilities of Struggling and Successful Readers

It is well-established that deficiencies in metacognitive understandings correlate with poor reading achievement (Lau & Chan, 2003; Roeschl-Heils, Schneider & van Kraayenoord, 2003) and that struggling readers are less able to monitor their own use of strategies during reading (Gaskins, Downer, Anderson, Cunningham, Gaskins, Schommer, and the teachers of the Benchmark School, 1988; Kavale, 1980). Furthermore, deficiencies in metacognitive knowledge in elementary school predict poor reading achievement in seventh and eighth grades (Roeschl-Heils et al, 2003) and it appears that the “the rich get richer” in terms of metacognitive understandings (Annevirta & Vauras, 2006).

Factors Affecting the Development of Metacognition

Numerous studies have explored possible reasons other than age (Flavell, et al, 1996; 1997) for differences in the metacognitive abilities of children. These include: sociocultural factors, including socioeconomic status (SES) (Cox, 1994) and socialization experiences (Jones, 2002; Pellegrini, 2001); engagement (Guterman, 2002); and instruction (Eilers & Pinkley, 2006; Flavell, 1997; Garner & Bochna, 2004; Jacobs, 2004).

In sum, the research on the metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of young children indicates that although this sense of awareness may not be fully developed, many children as young as preschool age from various backgrounds can and do exhibit metacognition on some level and it is important to success in beginning reading.

Children's Perceptions of Literacy and Instruction

Research on young readers' perceptions about literacy is limited, perhaps because some studies suggest that young children's perceptions about reading are relatively unstable (Henk & Melnick, 1995) and that young children tend to adopt the perceptions of their teachers (Weaver, 1994). In a study of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), Kazelskis, Thames, Reeves, Flynn, Taylor, Beard & Turnbo (2004/2005) concluded that children's attitudes about reading can change significantly within a short period of time and are influenced by factors such as compliments by teachers and the individual's perception of success in a recent literacy-related activity; therefore, attitudes need to be evaluated across time rather than in isolation.

However, the aforementioned studies examine perceptions from the perspective of Engagement Theory, focusing on the role of motivation and affect in reading. Although perceptions are contextualized, the focus is on the immediate context. For example, the child may be asked, "Do you like to do reading workbook pages?" The larger context, such as that of home and family is not acknowledged. In addition, an assumption is made that perceptions should be fixed. In contrast, using a socioconstructivist lens, perceptions are seen as created in activity between members of a community of shared practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The perception is snapshot of meaning-making as it is in progress. This meaning-making is mediated not only by the immediate context, but also the larger

context, such as the ways in which literacy is used in the home. From this perspective, perceptions are valuable as they are assembled in a “collage,” where patterns of meaning-making emerge.

Current research has begun to acknowledge such a view of perceptions. A small, but growing body of research gives voice to the participants—even young ones, in various learning situations, though researchers have noted how few studies focus on the perspectives of elementary-level literacy learners (Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Evans, 2002). The importance of such perspectives has been noted in the literature for at least two decades (Paley, 1986). Oldfather (2002) states, “...the subjective reality (i.e., the perception of the student) is central to the nature of his/her response to particular situations” (p. 234). A socioconstructive view of learning positions the student not as a passive absorber of information, but rather, an active participant in the construction of understanding. As such, the participants’ perspectives should play a role in shaping instruction (Dahl, Barto, Bonfils, Carasello, Christopher, Davis, Erkkila, Glander, Jacobs, Kendra, Koski, Majeski, McConnell, Petrie, Siegel, Slaby, Waldbauer, & Williams, 2003).

Clay’s (1998) extensive work with young literacy learners suggests that children come to school as experienced language users and that their knowledge of oral language and print mediate the sense they make of beginning reading instruction. Clay writes:

...there are important links between language, conversation, and thought... Yet probably the most common error made by adults about the learning of young children is that we can bypass what the child is thinking and just push new knowledge into their heads...any learning situation is like a conversation, for it requires the learner to bring what he or she already knows to bear on the new problem being explored (p. 15).

The influence of instruction on perceptions. Some research involving beginning literacy learners suggests that instruction, both formal and informal, is a powerful mediator of the beginner's evolving perceptions (Harrett & Benjamin, 2005; Werner, 2000). But by far, some of the most extensive work on the perceptions of beginning literacy learners has been done by Dahl & Freppon; the primary purpose of their work has been to examine the differences in the perceptions of children from two types of curricula, whole language (WL) and skills-based (SB) (Dahl & Freppon, 1995). What seems to differentiate Dahl & Freppon's work from studies that cast doubt on the perceptions of young children (Henk & Melnick, 1995; Kazelskis et al, 2005; Weaver, 1994) is that Dahl & Freppon value children's perceptions for what they reveal about how the child experiences reality, rather than as an objective view of the child's world. Dahl & Freppon's (1995) study of 48 inner-city kindergarten children indicates that differences emerged in children's perceptions about accuracy in their literacy-related work, understandings about the utility of phonics, responses to literature (including understandings about participation structures, coping strategies during difficulties, and sense of self as a literacy learner).

Dahl & Freppon's (1995) work is important because it lends support to the notion that rather than merely imitating the words of the teacher without real understanding, children are actively constructing their perceptions as they manipulate elements of their instruction in an attempt to make sense of literacy learning. As such, the perceptions of beginning readers can yield important clues about where this "sense-making" may break down for struggling beginners. Dahl & Freppon (1995) conclude:

The results presented a somewhat paradoxical picture. On the one hand, some findings, particularly those from quantitative measures, indicated a number of

similarities in learning outcomes as measured by the tasks assessing written language knowledge....children made progress in both approaches...On the other hand, many of the findings demonstrated that learners made different senses of reading and writing in light of their experiences (p. 70).

Dahl & Freppon go on to state:

The findings about letter-sound relations suggested that we have been asking the wrong questions. The important issue was not how children were taught in school-based settings, but rather what sense they could make. Unquestionably, phonics learning varied among focal learners in both studies. The essential difference was in the application learners made of their letter-sound knowledge and whether it was meaningful to them in terms of their understanding of written language knowledge (p. 70).

The researchers conclude, “Thus, the greatest difference appeared to be not what was being taught, but what children were learning—about themselves, about reading and writing, about school” (p. 71). These studies of perception suggest that a dynamic interaction takes place between the instructional context and the proficiency level of the student, affecting perceptions about one’s identity as a literacy learner. These perceptions appear to influence a reader’s persistence in various reading tasks, which would influence a reader’s rate of growth, and could, conceivably be a factor in the Mark Effect (i.e., “the rich get richer”) noted by Stanovich (1986).

Summary of the Literature

In the past, the struggling beginning reader was conceptualized as having one or more of the following characteristics:

- A blank slate in terms of literacy understandings
- “Unready” for literacy instruction
- Having biological deficits, most commonly of a visual nature
- Having oral language deficits
- Having difficulties that could stem from numerous sources

- Largely unaware of his/her own thinking and incapable of doing so

A rather different picture of the young struggler emerges from recent research:

- A product of his/her social, cultural, and instructional history
- Having assumptions about the uses of language in its various forms which may or may not match school uses of language
- Having perceptual difficulties that stem from relatively few sources, most commonly that of phonological weaknesses
- Having limited experience interacting with print in meaningful ways
- Disengaged from the process of reading, but responsive when supported
- Having difficulties that become more complex and manifest themselves in numerous ways as he/she matures
- Ill-equipped to profit from instruction, experiences, and his/her own developing abilities
- Unaware of his/her own thinking, not necessarily because he/she is incapable, but rather because of experiences that may not have facilitated such awareness

In contrast, successful emergent readers are characterized by the following:

- An ability to profit from their own advancing skills
- Phonological sensitivity
- Efficient use of linguistic cueing systems
- Well-developed language abilities, including oral language and vocabulary
- Preference for “paper and pencil” or other literacy-related play activities

- A literacy-rich home environment with many verbal interactions between family members
- Many experiences with print
- Home uses of language parallel school uses
- Ability to use language in decontextualized ways
- An increasing ability to think about one's own thinking

Much has been learned, particularly in recent years, about the etiology of reading difficulties, but the ways in which those difficulties interact in the life of a struggling reader are less clear. Unlike the proficient beginning reader who appears equipped to profit from his/her experiences and growing abilities, the struggler fails to notice or utilize the cues that are inherent in the reading process. As the successful beginner continues to improve, at least to some extent as a result of his/her own efforts, i.e., “bootstrapping”, the struggler (sometimes unwittingly aided by those charged with helping) adopts behaviors that result in what appears to be a widening gap between those who succeed and those who struggle.

Implications for Research

Although the literature reviewed represented multiple theoretical frames, the research suggests that factors affecting beginning readers are interrelated (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). For example, there is evidence to suggest that phonological awareness is linked to the size of a child's vocabulary (Goswami, 2001; Wagner, Torgeson, Rashotte, Hecht, Barker, Burgess, Donahue, & Garon, 1997) and that vocabulary is linked to SES (Hart & Risley, 1995). Such interrelationships lend support to the notion that beginning readers,

particularly those who struggle, cannot be fully understood apart from the contextual layers that may impact their literacy learning.

Adding to the complexity of the picture of beginning readers, we know that those who struggle for various reasons with learning to read often adopt behaviors that may further complicate literacy learning; they also appear to adopt some beliefs and assumptions about themselves as literacy learners and about the literacy instruction they engage in that may also impact their ability to succeed. These beliefs and assumptions are largely unexplored. And while some research suggests that the perceptions of young children are unreliable, the work that has been done, particularly that of Dahl & Freppon (1995), has yielded valuable insights. The body of work on young children's perceptions, though small, indicates that much can be learned, and instruction can be improved, by better understanding how the young beginner perceives his/her own literacy learning.

Considerable research exists on factors affecting the young child's ability to succeed with beginning reading skills. However, the bulk of this research is from the perspective of the adults involved in the process. Missing from the literature is a holistic sense of the meanings children construct from beginning reading instruction. This study attempts to address this gap in the literature by giving children the opportunity to voice their perceptions of the many literacy learning experiences in which they engage during this critical beginning reading phase.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study explored children's perceptions about the nature of reading and the meaning constructed from literacy events in the classroom as factors which may facilitate or complicate the progress of beginners. The goal of the study was to contribute to the current knowledge base by looking holistically at four beginning readers of varying ability levels as they engaged in literacy-learning activities in their first grade classroom.

Research Questions

The research addressed the following questions:

1. How do beginning readers perceive the nature of reading?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?
2. What meanings do beginning readers construct from their literacy-learning experiences?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?

Design and Methodology

A socioconstructivist frame informs all aspects of this study, including design and methodology. To answer the above questions, a case study design was used. The purpose of a case study is to gain a holistic picture of the object of study. A Vygotskian perspective on learning, which positions the beginning reader not as a vessel to be filled with information, nor as an organism that requires training to elicit automatic responses, but as a complex individual whose developing cognition is shaped by interactions with others as they engage in shared activity. Consistent with this theoretical perspective, a case study allows the researcher to explore the many and varied factors that may facilitate

or complicate the progress of a beginning reader. Extending this perspective, the New Literacy Studies view literacy not as a singular construct of school-based skills, but as multiliteracies, i.e., language practices embedded in everyday activities both in and out of school. A case study design lends itself to rich description that facilitates the teasing out of patterns of meaning-making, so that a richer picture of beginning readers can be constructed. This case study was designed to describe how four beginning readers of varying ability levels view the experience of learning to read in a first grade classroom. To gain a comprehensive picture of how these four students perceive literacy learning, I studied students from a first grade classroom at the school where I was formerly employed as a reading teacher in the primary level Title I reading program.

Pilot Studies

Two pilot studies inform the present research. First, in the context of taking a doctoral course in early literacy instruction, I designed an informal study that was designed to help me better understand how four struggling beginners in my first grade Title I reading class perceived their literacy-related instruction (Brown, 2005). I asked questions such as: 1. If I didn't know how to read and wanted to learn, what would you tell me to do? 2. What does your teacher do to help you be a good reader? 3. Do you ever write at home? 4. Show me what you write. I audio-recorded the interviews and looked for similarities and differences in the children's responses. Clear patterns emerged from the data, suggesting that the struggling readers did not understand the semiotic nature of print. I then decided to interview four successful beginning readers in first grade. The responses of the succeeders was strikingly different from the strugglers, with successful students viewing

reading as a process of decoding text; in addition, succeeders used the language of their instruction to articulate their understandings.

A second pilot study was done with three strugglers and two succeeders (Brown, 2007). In this study, I refined my methodology and addressed the following research questions:

1. How do beginning readers of varying ability levels perceive the nature of reading?
2. What does the beginning reader think it means to be successful as a reader and what role does s/he see him/herself playing in becoming a good reader?
3. How do beginning readers of varying ability levels perceive the literacy learning events in a first grade classroom?

In the four week study, I observed students during the Language Arts block of instruction and conducted one semi-structured interview with each student. I concluded that print mediated the meanings constructed by succeeders in ways it did not for strugglers.

In designing the present study, I wanted to explore the larger contextual factors that shape the children's perceptions, such as family literacy practices. The pilot study informed the method that follows. First, I refined the selection process, and attempted to balance the sample according to gender, ethnicity, and SES. Second, I expanded the use of interviews. In an effort to gain a better understanding about the child's family background and out-of-school literacy practices, each child was asked to bring three artifacts from home. During an informal interview, which I audiotaped, I asked the child to tell about his/her objects; I asked the child questions about why s/he selected the object to bring and how it was used. During the second half of the study, I conducted informal

interviews of the children as they worked in the classroom in an effort to gain an understanding of the child's perceptions of instruction as it was being experienced.

Setting

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), Slatington has a population of 4400 with 66% of its population in the labor force. In 80% of the families with children under age 6, both parents work. The median household income is \$36,000, with 31% of the population earning less than \$25,000. The results of my first pilot study (Brown, 2005) and the informal interactions I experienced with the families of my students while a teacher at Northern Lehigh suggest that the background of some families in the district is similar to that of the family studied by Purcell-Gates (1995). Purcell-Gates (1995) describes the phenomenon as "the cycle of low-literacy;" she explains that print did not mediate the everyday experiences of the individuals in the family she studied and that such experiences impacted the family members' abilities to improve their literacy skills. In my experiences as a Title I teacher at the school, I found that children in the Northern Lehigh School District are far more likely to own video tapes and DVDs than books or magazines. Like the family in Purcell-Gates' study, many Northern Lehigh families rarely venture outside the town; consequently, some students come to school limited in the kinds of background experiences teachers assume children have had. For example, during one of my Title I reading classes, my students read a book about the beach. Never having visited the seashore, students had difficulty predicting vocabulary such as "shovel," "pail," and "suntan."

Prior to turning onto the road on which the school is located, one drives through the town of Slatington. Main Street is a combination of Victorian-style buildings (many in

need of repair), and store-front shops that house family businesses. Hand-lettered signs advertise “bag sales” at the second-hand shop run by a local church, “Deli Meats Sold Here” at the grocer, shoe repairs, and the daily specials at Slatington Diner. The library, another small storefront building, displays framed pictures and sports memorabilia rather than books in the windows. Heading south, out of town and toward the school, more hand-written signs advertise a coming circus with a dog show and a pony as the featured entertainment and a carnival that had just been held.

The setting for this study is the Peters Elementary School, which houses Kindergarten through second grade, in the Northern Lehigh School District. Though Allentown, located just 18 miles south of Slatington, is now Pennsylvania’s fourth largest city, the town of Slatington, a former mining community where the school is located, continues to retain a small-town atmosphere. After turning onto a winding country road in the midst of a residential community of neatly maintained farmhouses, modest one-story homes, and a few bi-levels, the school is easily identified by a brightly colored marquis that welcomes passersby to Peter’s Elementary and announces school events for the coming month. The school is a neat brick one-story building with a two-story addition on one end. Colored banners and children’s artwork line the windows and doors. The front doors open to a view of the library, which can be looked down upon from the foyer through a half-wall of glass. In front of the glass, and directly in front of students and visitors as they enter the building, is a frequently updated display, often focused on encouraging reading in the home. For example, during the month of October, a life-sized cardboard monster held a sign that read, “Mummy, read to me.” Fall books were displayed on the table beside the figure. Another table holds literature for parents,

including a school newsletter, written by the principal, which nearly always contains a column on some aspect of family literacy. Turning to the left, the hallway, adorned with colorful displays of children's writing and artwork, leads to Mrs. P's first grade classroom.

The first grade level was chosen for this research because students at this level are usually beginning to read connected text; however, some students are not yet able to do so. As such, clear differences are generally evident between strugglers and succeeders. Also, at this level, family literacy practices are still a considerable influence on the young learner.

In the school where the study is situated, students' progress in reading is monitored through regular assessments of reading subskills. Students deemed at-risk for reading failure are assessed weekly, students deemed at some risk are assessed monthly, and those considered low-risk are assessed three times during the school year. A child's ability to say the names and sounds of a row of letters (Letter Naming Fluency/LNF; Letter Sound Fluency/LSF), segment the sounds in words spoken aloud (Phonemic Segmentation Fluency/PSF), and read a list of nonsense words (Nonsense Word Fluency/NWF) are designed to give a quantitative measure of a student's progress toward reading proficiency. The value of such subskill assessments is not the focus of this study; rather, the aim was to examine other factors, those not so easily quantified, that may play a role in a beginning reader's success.

Northern Lehigh recently implemented a district-wide reading initiative. A Response to Intervention (RTI) model for identifying and intervening for students at-risk of reading failure has been put in place. All students are assessed at least three times per year with

AimsWeb, a series of one-minute assessments designed to measure a student's "health" as a reader. Students who achieve below benchmark either receive monthly progress monitoring and in-class support, or weekly progress monitoring and pull-out support in the form of an intervention program such as *Reading Mastery*, which is offered to the lowest performing students, or *My Sidewalks*, an intervention program published by Scott Foresman, which accompanies the basal reading series used in the classroom. The two intervention programs are taught by the Title I reading teacher in a pull-out, small group setting with no more than three students per class. In addition, all students receive literacy instruction in the regular classroom. Teachers regularly engage in reading aloud, shared reading and writing, literacy learning centers, and independent reading and writing activities. The district recently adopted a basal reading program for first grade published by Scott Foresman. The present first grade class is the third class to participate in a district-wide full-day kindergarten program and the strugglers in this class received *Early Reading Intervention* (ERI) by Scott Foresman during their kindergarten year.

At the close of the kindergarten year, the principal and the Title I reading teachers assign kindergarten students to first grade classrooms on the basis of benchmark reading assessment scores. Care is taken to ensure even distribution of reading ability levels in each first grade classroom. Therefore, the assumption was made that the first grade classroom, which was recommended by the principal, represented the distribution of ability levels that is characteristic of all first grade classrooms in the building and includes students of a wide range of reading abilities. The principal suggested that the present study be conducted with Mrs. P, the teacher who participated in the second pilot study.

Mrs. P

Mrs. P is a teacher with over twenty years of experience at the primary level. She has been influenced both by a knowledge of guided reading and by the skills-based reading initiative in the district. Her instruction, and by extension, the official script of the classroom, reflects both sets of beliefs. Three metaphors emerge that illustrate how reading is viewed in this classroom. First, Mrs. P sees reading as a ticket that will provide access to new worlds for her students. “I want to give them the love of reading,” she said during our interview. She views literacy as a lifelong skill; her ultimate goal is to help students not only read well, but to love reading. In response to this, Mrs. P provides many opportunities for students to engage with interesting texts of all types. But while Mrs. P sees reading ultimately as a meaning-making process, she sees learning to decode and become fluent as foundational to making meaning:

We’re building up to comprehension, but I think the phonemic awareness and the phonics is the important one in first grade. Developing fluent readers is the thing in first grade and hopefully the other grades build on that and you get comprehension.

In this respect, the second metaphor for reading is a set of skills to be mastered sequentially (Barton, 1994). Comprehension is viewed as a byproduct of fluency. As a result, in instruction at the first grade level, the development of word-level skills takes priority over making sense of text and the two parts of the process may be separated from each other. Finally, reading proficiency is viewed as health. This perspective results from a district-wide reading initiative which has been influenced by the work of Kame’enui, Simmons, Chard, & Dickson (1997). In this model, failure to learn to read is an illness to be cured (Barton, 1994; Kame’enui, et al., 1997), and treatment is provided through intensive doses of explicit, step-by-step remedial instruction.

Sample

Creswell (1998) argues that sampling for case studies must be purposeful, with the focus being on either the typical or the unusual case. Merriam (1998), in differentiating types of purposeful sampling, explains “maximum variation sampling,” as a type that, due to the great disparity in a particular characteristic, has the potential to yield important information, even when the sample size is small. In this study, the aim was to identify students who typify the experiences of beginning readers who struggle most and those who appear to be most successful. Because reading is a complex process, no single measure alone could be used to identify such students. According to Merriam (1998), it is important to not only list the criteria used in the selection process but to tell why they are important. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Selection Criteria

Criteria	Rationale
1. Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	Predictor of beginning reading success (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001)
2. Letter Sound Fluency (LSF)	Predictor of beginning reading success (Kame’enui & Simmons, 2001)
3. Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)	Assesses a beginner’s ability to put together the skills and subskills of the reading process by reading connected text from an actual piece of literature (Beaver

- 2003)
4. Kindergarten Benchmark Assessments (LNF, LSF) Suggests patterns of performance (Juel, 1988)
 5. Anecdotal evidence from first-grade classroom teacher The teacher has the opportunity to see the child's performance as a beginning reader holistically.
 6. Scott Foresman placement test (phonemic awareness, letter naming, letter sounds, and sight words) An untimed test administered to those students who scored poorly on LNF and LSF assessments to determine whether students had the potential to perform better when given more time and to look at additional measures of phonemic awareness (Stanovich, 1986) and sight word recognition.
 7. Students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP); students whose first language is not English Students with IEP's or ELL's eliminated from consideration; the focus of the study is on students who have the greatest potential to profit from instruction as it is presented in the first grade classroom.
 8. Shyness; serious behavior issues Students with these characteristics eliminated from consideration because they may not be able or willing to articulate their perceptions to the researcher.

The initial phase of the selection process was based on test score data which identified students in the bottom 25% and top 25% of the class. Benchmark assessments administered during the second week of school included Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) and Letter-Sound Fluency (LSF), the pre-test assessment for the Scott Foresman basal series, and performance on the *Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)*. These were used to identify the five weakest beginning readers and the five strongest beginning readers in the class of 18. The results of the above assessments were not clear cut, as some students performed better in one area than the other, so overall performance in all areas was considered more strongly than strong scores in one particular area.

Benchmark assessment data from the end of the kindergarten year was also considered when available, as a way of confirming that performance on the first grade tests was part of a continuing pattern of success or failure. The classroom teacher was then asked to validate the selection based on her observation of in-class performance since the beginning of the school year. I provided the teacher with a list of names and the teacher concurred with the ten students, five struggling and five successful, who were identified as possible participants.

During my preliminary visits to the classroom, one of the five successful beginners and one of the five struggling beginners who would have been candidates for consideration were eliminated on the basis of behavior. The successful student was sent home from school on multiple occasions due to out-of-control behavior, including screaming, pushing over desks, and pounding on cabinets. (During the course of the study, this student was diagnosed with autism.) A second student, a struggler, was

eliminated after conferring with the Title I teacher and the classroom teacher. The teachers felt that his lack of progress was due to his unwillingness to cooperate in learning activities. (This proved to be a good decision as this student did show enough improvement during the course of the study to be moved from his Title I group to a group of higher-performing students.) After eliminating these students, I had four potential strugglers and four potential succeeders.

The next phase of the selection process involved consideration of socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and gender. The principal said she was not permitted to allow access to free and reduced lunch information, so this could not be used to determine SES. As an alternative, anecdotal evidence was utilized, as Mrs. P was asked to classify each child under consideration as low, middle, and high SES, based on her knowledge of the children and their families. She was asked to refrain from classifying any student she felt unsure about. Mrs. P felt confident in making this determination for each of her students in all but one case. In addition, I used the students' addresses to gain a sense of the locale and type of home they lived in and I consulted with each child's kindergarten teacher. The only area of disagreement between Mrs. P and the kindergarten teacher was with regard to Juan's SES status. Mrs. P had initially classified him as lower-middle SES, but the kindergarten teacher reported that Juan lived in a low-income housing development. Juan's participation in the Head Start preschool program lent additional support to the kindergarten teacher's contention that Juan should be classified as low SES. Children were classified according to ethnicity and gender, with the goal of achieving a gender-, SES-, and ethnicity-balanced sample, to the extent that this was possible, while still focusing on students who exhibited maximum differences in literacy abilities. With the

exception of two students, all class members were considered middle-SES. With the exception of, one student, all class members were Caucasian.

One male student clearly outscored his classmates. He was selected as a succeder. A female was outscored by two other students, but not the same two students; her performance was the best across scores, including the DRA. One male and one female student were clearly the lowest scorers; however, the male moved shortly after the commencement of the study. A second male, a low SES Hispanic student was chosen as the next lowest scorer. Given that his performance was markedly below the next low-scoring student, he was selected as the second struggler. I verified his status as an English-only speaker by consulting with Mrs. P to insure that he was not receiving ESL services and checked the home language survey in his cumulative file. I also asked him if he spoke Spanish or any language other than English; he said that he did not.

The students were given parental permission forms allowing them to participate in the study and allowing me to access the student's work samples and assessment data; the classroom teacher was also be given a permission form, indicating her willingness to participate in the study (App. A). The characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants

Name	LNF Scores	LSF Scores	DRA Level	Basal Placement Test	Socio- Economic Status	Gender & Ethnicity
Alicia	28	11	A	72%	Middle- SES	Female- Caucasian
Juan	19	15	1	84%	Lower- SES	Male- Hispanic
Julie	56	46	12	Not applicable	Middle- SES	Female- Caucasian
Mark	80	70	12	Not applicable	Middle- SES	Male- Caucasian

The Succeeders

Julie. Julie, Caucasian girl of six, is friendly, reflective, and talkative. Julie comes from a middle-SES family with one older sister and three younger brothers. Her father is a mechanic and her mother stays at home to care for the family. Though Julie does not get a great deal of direct support for literacy learning from her parents, they support her indirectly in many ways. The family spends time together visiting places and doing things that Julie finds interesting and enjoyable. In addition, Julie is provided with many “paper and pencil” resources, as well as unstructured time to engage in literacy-related

play. One of her favorite out-of-school activities is playing school, which Julie does “all the time,” according to her mother. Julie enjoys reading both at home and at school and does so for a variety of purposes.

Mark. Mark, a Caucasian boy of six, is quiet and slightly shy. He comes from a middle SES family. Mark has two older sisters. His mother works at a bookstore and his father works for Verizon. Mark’s kindergarten teacher reported that Mark’s mother registered him for kindergarten a year early, but later changed her mind. Though Mark was reading at the age of four, he entered kindergarten “socially backward” according to his teacher. During kindergarten Mark not only “blossomed socially,” but also improved his fluency, i.e., added prosodic elements to his oral reading and improved comprehension. Mark reported that he enjoys spending time with his family and that they often travel and play games together. He also likes to spend time on the computer.

The Strugglers

Alicia. Alicia, a petite Caucasian girl of six, is the youngest of her class, having just turned six a few days before the school year started. Her Title I teacher describes her as “sweet and cooperative” but “such a baby.” This sentiment, not expressed unkindly, was echoed by Alicia’s kindergarten teacher and Mrs. P. All of the teachers expressed sincere concern that Alicia simply did not seem to have the maturity of her classmates. Alicia comes from a middle-SES family; her mother works at the daycare Alicia has attended since birth and her father is a factory worker. Though Alicia reported that she is read to “sometimes,” it seems that the completion of school assignments comprises much out-of-school time. Alicia’s mother is very concerned about Alicia’s progress and reports spending up to two and one-half hours per evening helping with homework. Interview

data suggests that such sessions may often result in frustration. Alicia reported that she enjoys watching DVD's and playing games with her younger brother when not in school. Alicia entered kindergarten knowing few letters and sounds and her progress, even with intensive intervention progress, was slow. She began first grade knowing many letters and sounds but has difficulty blending and recognizing sight words. She attends Title I classes which use *Reading Mastery* for approximately forty minutes each day.

Juan. Juan is a low-SES Hispanic boy of six. Though his kindergarten teacher reported that "Juan's biggest problem is a lack of motivation," he appeared cooperative and friendly throughout the observation period. Juan's mother reported that English is Juan's first language and the language that is spoken in the home. Juan said that he does not know Spanish or any language other than English. However, difficulties with oral language abilities became apparent during my semi-structured and informal interviews with him. Juan lives with his mother, father, older sister, baby brother, and grandfather. He reports that his mother works at the local high school and his father "lays streets." Juan said he likes to watch TV in his free time and has one in his room. He also shares an interest in cars with his father. When asked if anyone read to him, he said, "No, no one reads to me." He reported that when the family spends time together, they watch TV or go to McDonald's to eat. When asked if the family travels, he reported that they "go to birthday parties." Juan entered kindergarten knowing no letters or sounds and was unable to write his name. He also had poor social skills. He began first grade knowing most letters, but had difficulty with phonemic awareness, blending, and sight words. He attends Title I classes daily, where he receives instruction in *My Sidewalks*, an intervention program that accompanies the basal used in the classroom.

Data Collection and Management Procedures

Data sources. According to Creswell (1998), data collection for a case study should include information from multiple sources, such as documents, records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts of a particular activity. My primary means of data collection was semi-structured formal interviews with students, but during the second half of the observation period, when the students had become more familiar with my presence in the classroom, I interviewed students informally as they worked in the classroom. My ability to interview informally was dictated to some extent by the schedule of instruction; I only did so when it would cause minimal disruption to the classroom. I conducted a formal, semi-structured interview with the classroom teacher to gain a sense of her beliefs about literacy instruction at the first grade level. I conducted informal interviews with the participants' kindergarten teachers as a means of learning about students' family background. In addition, I observed the students in the classroom during various literacy-learning activities and examined documents and artifacts, such as work samples, instructional materials, and assessment data. The interviews, observations, and documents were designed to address the research questions as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Purposefulness of Data Sources

Research Question #1:	Primary Data Source:	Secondary Data Source:
<i>How do beginning readers perceive the nature of reading and what it means to be successful? How do these perceptions differ according to ability?</i>	Formal Semi-structured Interviews Observations	Documents and Artifacts
Research Question #2:	Primary Data Sources:	Secondary Data Sources:
<i>What meanings do readers construct from beginning literacy experiences? How do these perceptions differ according to ability?</i>	Formal Semi-structured Interviews Informal Interviews Observations	Documents and Artifacts

Observations. According to Wolcott (1992), purposefully attending to things others may consider of little or no importance differentiates the qualitative researcher from the untrained observer. Merriam (1998) argues that observations must meet four criteria to be differentiated from casual “watching”: 1) matched to research purpose, 2) intentional (See Observation Protocol, App. B), 3) systematically recorded, and 4) controlled for

validity and reliability. An attempt was made to meet each of these criteria as displayed in Table 4:

Table 4

Observation Criteria Linked to Study Design

Criteria (Merriam, 1998)	Study Design Features
Observation matched to research purpose	See Figure 3: “Purposefulness of data sources”
Intentionality	See App. B: “Observation Protocol”; Figure 5 (below)
Systematic recording	App. B; field note organization by subject area and time; labeling of field notes (Merriam, 1998)
Validity and reliability controls	Use of researcher journal to control for researcher bias (Creswell, 1998); triangulation of observation data with teacher and student interview data and document analysis (Creswell, 1998)

I visited the school one day per week from October 3, 2007 through January 2, 2008 with the goal of observing the Language Arts block. However, I found that Language Arts was the focus of most of the first-graders’ day with the exceptions of: 30 minutes of math, lunch, recess, and weekly “specials,” such as music, art, and physical education. Therefore, I observed the students during the full school day as they engaged in the

following activities: read-aloud time, shared reading, phonics, guided reading, whole class reading instruction, writing, center activities, and seatwork. During these visits, my original intent was to focus on one student throughout a day's observations, but I found that it was possible to observe two students simultaneously and still take adequate field notes. I selected pairs with the intention of focusing some observations on matched ability pairs and some on varied ability pairs. I did this to facilitate my ability to compare and contrast the behaviors of the focal students of similar and different ability levels. Each student was observed six times according to the following schedule in Table 5.

Table 5

Data Collection Schedule

Observation	Focus
Prior to Study	General Observation
9/18/07	Teacher Interview
Observation 1	Succeeders 1, 2
10/3/07	Observation
Observation 2	Strugglers 1, 2
10/10/07	Observation
Observation 3	Succeeders 1, 2
10/17/07	Observation
Observation 4	Strugglers 1, 2
10/24/07	Observation
Observation 5	Struggler 1
10/31/07	Succeeder 2
	Observation

	Interview: Struggler 1
Observation 6	Struggler 2
11/7/07	Succeeder 1
	Observation
	Interview: Succeeder 1
Observation 7	Struggler 1
11/14/07	Succeeder 2
	Observation
	Interview: Succeeder 2
Observation 8	Struggler 2
11/28/07	Succeeder 1
	Observation
	Interview: Struggler 2
Observation 9	Struggler 1
12/5/07	Succeeder 2
	Observation
Observation 10	Struggler 2
12/12/07	Succeeder 1
	Observation
Observation 11	Struggler 1
12/19/07	Succeeder 2
	Observation
Observation 12	Succeeder 1

1/2/08

Succeeder 2

Observation

Succeeder1: Julie
Succeeder 2: Mark
Struggler 1: Alicia
Struggler 2: Juan

During the observations, I seated myself on the perimeter of the classroom (when students were seated at their desks) or the group (when students were gathered at the easel area where group instruction often took place) with the intent of being able to see the faces of the focal students. My goal was to be close enough to be able to observe students' eye and mouth movements so I could determine whether they were focusing on print and whether they were reading with the group or slightly behind peers. With the exception of times when special activities occurred in the classroom, such as parent visitation and guest readers, I moved a child-sized chair approximately three feet from the outer perimeter of the group. This usually allowed me to be within approximately eight to ten feet of both focal students.

During all phases of literacy instruction, I watched the focal students intently, writing notes in my field journal about movements, behaviors, gestures, speech, and facial expressions. Each field notebook page was divided in the center, with one side for each student. I left room in the left margin to record the time, subject area, and my own thoughts or questions. In addition, I prepared observation protocols (App. B) which were completed on both of the focal students approximately every fifteen minutes, with the intention of accurately recording the frequency of the kinds of behaviors that were

observed to differ between strugglers and succeeders in the pilot study. The purpose of the prepared protocol was to facilitate my ability to intently watch what may seem to be ordinary behaviors to a classroom teacher but which the pilot study suggested may indicate important differences between strugglers and succeeders. During classroom observations, a new protocol checklist was marked for each focal student approximately every fifteen minutes. Checkmarks indicated the frequency of looking and attending behaviors, designated as occurring “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely,” “never”, or “not applicable”.

During the first day of the observations, I used a digital recorder to make an audio recording of the instruction, which I later transcribed. My purpose for the audio recording of the classroom observation was two-fold: 1) to check my field notes for accuracy and clarify anything that seemed ambiguous in my jottings, 2) to have a record of the “classroom conversation” as it takes place between teacher and students during literacy instruction, since my attention was primarily focused on particular students.

On subsequent days of the observations, as I become familiar with the classroom routines, I discontinued the transcription but kept the recordings so that I could expand and clarify my field notes as needed. Informal analysis began with the writing of more complete field notes based on jottings taken during the observations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

Notes were made on the learning context, including classroom and instruction, as well as the children. The purpose of the field notes was to generate rich, thick description of the classroom atmosphere and the behaviors of the focus students as they experienced literacy instruction. My description of the physical space of the learning

environment, the instruction, and student behaviors were used as a point of comparison with the students' perceptions of their experiences in the classroom. I made decisions about what to include in the field notes based on relevance to the research questions. Each evening following the observation, I read over the field notes. According to Marshall & Rossman (1999), data analysis should begin early in the process; by reviewing field notes following each observation, subsequent observations are better focused and the tendency to collect too much data is reduced. As I looked over the notes, I also made a note in the margin that suggested a connection between the information gathered and the research questions; this was done in the left-hand margin of my field notes in order to differentiate it from notes taken during the observations. According to Merriam (1998), this preliminary labeling is an important part of analysis because it is a means of linking data to the research questions.

Teacher interviews. Prior to beginning observations of the students, I conducted an initial semi-structured interview with the classroom teacher for the purpose of getting the teacher's perspective on the relationship between the literacy instruction that takes place in the classroom and the focus students as beginning literacy learners (See Appendix C). The interview took place on the morning of my pre-study visit to the school in the teacher's classroom. The teacher was asked to describe the literacy curriculum in relation to her own beliefs about literacy learning. She was also asked to describe her understanding of successful and struggling beginners in general, as well as more specifically about the focal students. The interview was recorded, with the teacher's permission, using a digital recorder. Files were electronically stored, labeled with the date, assigned a number, and transcribed.

Near the end of the study, I informally interviewed each child's kindergarten teacher for the purpose of learning more about the family background of the focal children. I prepared a list of topics to address:

- Parent education level and employment
- Parent support for literacy learning in school
- SES
- Family experiences such as travel and the provision of "paper and pencil" resources
- Description of the child as a literacy learner upon entering kindergarten
- Progress in literacy learning during kindergarten and preparedness for first grade
- Social, emotional, and developmental characteristics of the child as a kindergartener

I interviewed two kindergarten teachers; one teacher had had three of the four students who participated and the second teacher had had one student. I audiotaped the interviews and made notes in my field journal.

Student interviews. According to Patton (1990, p. 196, as qtd. in Merriam, 1998, p. 72):

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective.

On one of the days a particular child was the focal student, I took him/her out of the classroom for a one-on-one, semi-structured interview which lasted approximately 20 minutes. In the interview, my goal was to gain a sense of how the child “organized his/her world” as a literacy learner in Mrs. P’s classroom and to see what meanings the child attached to various literacy-related activities. I also sought to ask the child about things I could not observe, such as his/her literacy activities at home. I made a decision to take all participants out for an interview following a guided reading lesson. The reason for this was that I wanted to ask each of them to describe the activity they had just experienced while it was fresh in their minds. I selected the guided reading lesson because I thought it would be an instructional activity that incorporated many different aspects of reading instruction; I was interested in what each participant would find salient. However, I did not anticipate the degree to which the instruction differed for strugglers and succeeders, and I later decided to question students about their perceptions of the read-aloud time and Saxon Phonics as well. The students did not seem to have difficulty recalling the instructional events even though they had not taken place immediately prior to the interview. They talked easily about the lessons, making accurate references to what had been addressed that day by the teacher.

Each student who was interviewed was taken out of the classroom after their guided reading lesson; for the strugglers, this lesson occurred most often in the Title I room, taught by the Title I reading teacher. I first asked students about their perceptions of the instruction they received just prior to the interview, and then asked about their understanding of the nature of reading and writing and about their literacy practices at home (App. D). In addition to the semi-structured interviews, students were interviewed

informally as they engaged in seatwork and other activities throughout the day to gain a sense of the meanings they constructed from other literacy-related classroom activities. Once I began the semi-structured interviews, students seemed to feel more comfortable with my presence in the classroom. I frequently walked around as children were doing seatwork and talked with them about the tasks they were working on. I also conducted informal interviews before the school day started, asking focal students to give me “tours” of various parts of the classroom space.

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were transcribed within two days of the interview. Three copies of each interview transcript was made, with one set being filed in the master binder by date and data source, one in the student binder by date and data source, and one color-coded for each student, which was later cut apart and sorted into categories for analysis, but still easily linked to the participant. Audio files were stored electronically and assigned a number.

Documents and artifacts. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), texts of various sorts are “voices begging to be heard” (p. 163). In addition to photocopying the work samples Mrs. P collected in each focal student’s folder, on the day a child was the focal student, to the extent that it was possible, I collected copies of work done by the child in class, including worksheets, writing samples, and tests. This provided yet another way of capturing the voice of each student. Specifically, the purpose of the collection of work samples was three-fold: 1) to be used as a springboard for interview questions, 2) to be used as a means of support or contrast for interview data, and 3) to view work that represents the developing literacy understandings of each focal student. I also examined instructional materials, such as literature in the classroom, teacher’s manuals, guided

reading books, basals, worksheets, and class-composed writing that was displayed in the room or hallway to lend support to the description of the classroom atmosphere in my field notes. Assessment data from Spring of the student's kindergarten year, and the Fall and Winter of first grade were photocopied and examined. Student documents and artifacts were labeled with the child's name, date collected, and context, and then filed in the student binders. General classroom artifacts were filed in the master binder. I questioned the document/artifact data by referring to the questions cited in Merriam (1998).

Organizing the data. Binders and file folders were used to organize and manage the data set. A large binder was used as the "master file". This binder was divided into sections according to the following data sources: Observation Protocols, Observation Field Notes, Observation Transcripts, Interview Transcripts, and Documents. All data was filed by date within these sections. In addition, an individual binder was created for each participant. Like in the master binder, data was filed by data source and then by date within each section. Sections of the student binders were labeled as follows: Field Notes, Observation Protocols, Interviews, and Documents. Multiple photocopies of the field notes were made and if the field note set for the observation date contained a reference to a particular participant, the full day's notes were included in the student's binder. Names were highlighted for easy reference each time they appeared in the notes. Once data collection was complete, each page of the master data record was assigned an alpha-numeric code that reflected the data source and page number. For example, the first page of the field notes was labeled: FN1. Participant binders were paginated to match the pages in the master binder so that data pertaining to an individual could be

easily contextualized. As the data set was cut apart at various stages of the analysis process, file folders were used to collect and categorize the pieces. Prior to cutting apart field notes and transcripts, the data was chunked, labeled, and tagged with the alpha-numeric code so that it could be contextualized by matching to the page in the master binder. (Details of the chunking and labeling process are further explained later in this paper.) Then photocopies were made on colored paper, so that as data was cut apart, it could be matched to the student: Alicia/yellow, Julie/pink, Juan/green, Mark/blue

Situating the researcher. My interest in the perceptions of beginning literacy learners began when I was a graduate student at Marywood University. While pursuing a Master's Degree in Reading Education, it seemed that the more I learned about diagnosing and remediating reading difficulties, the more questions I had about why some children struggled while others succeeded. I began my work as a reading specialist in a small private school, and later took a position as a Title I Reading Teacher in a public elementary school. I found that in spite of research-based interventions, some children continued to struggle, and often did so for reasons that were not readily apparent. In response to No Child Left Behind legislation, the public elementary school where I taught shifted from strategy-based remedial instruction to scripted, skills-based intervention programs. Though I chafed at the teaching methods of the new intervention programs, the administration was pleased with the results—dramatic improvements in the kindergartners' performance on subskill tests of letter naming fluency (LNF), letter-sound fluency (LSF), phonemic segmentation fluency (PSF), and even blending sounds into words. But I had concerns. Were my students learning things about literacy that I was not intending to teach? And would improvement in the subskill areas result in my

struggling students becoming “readers”? Conversations with first grade teachers suggested that some students, even some deemed at low risk according to subskill test scores, continued to experience difficulty in learning to read. “They are just not taking off as I had hoped,” was voiced all too frequently, given the intensity of the research-based, early intervention efforts.

Through my doctoral studies at Rutgers University, which I began while still employed in the public school, I found that a socioconstructivist framework provided a useful lens through which to better understand struggling students. Through this lens, I began to examine some of my own beliefs about literacy learning and the assumptions I held about my students as literacy learners. With the help of mentors and colleagues, I attempted to improve my pedagogy by viewing beginning readers, particularly those who struggle, as novices in a community of shared practice who have been shaped by the “ways with words” (Heath, 1983) that they have experienced in their own families and communities. This framework, in which the beginning reader is viewed contextually, shaped my teaching and also informs this study.

Researcher stance. Considering the stance of the researcher from the perspective of a continuum from “observer” to “participant,” I functioned as close to the “observer” end of the continuum as possible (Dahl & Freppon, 1995), for the purpose of seeing students as they would normally engage in literacy-related activities. It quickly became apparent that maintaining an observer stance would be a challenge with first graders, to whom a smiling and friendly adult that regularly visits the classroom and converses with members of the class becomes, at least on occasion, a classroom resource. I was careful to limit the help I offered, as one of the strugglers began to come to me frequently for help with her

seatwork. Merriam (1998), in describing the stance of the researcher who is primarily an observer and secondarily a participant states, “Here researchers observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider’s identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership” (p. 101). I used a researcher journal to clarify my thinking about stance and to help myself to guard against becoming a part of the core classroom community. In general, I attempted to redirect students as quickly as possible to the task at hand or feigned ignorance about the task, but I did not turn away students who seemed in need of a quick response or who wanted to share their work with me in some way. As I observed and interviewed the children, I tried to take on the role of a “friendly adult,” rather than teacher or authority figure. Situating myself on the outer perimeter of where the children gathered for instruction was one way of maintaining my observer stance.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (1998), data analysis of a case study should be comprised of “...pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways” (p. 154). Each interview question from my protocol was attached to poster paper. Transcripts, color-coded by student, were cut apart and responses to each interview question were matched to the appropriate question and affixed to the poster paper. This display of the information facilitated the understanding of individual belief systems as well as cross-case comparisons between strugglers and succeeders.

Analysis of the data to construct the case occurred in three stages. The goal of Stages One and Two was to describe the literacy instruction as it took place in this particular classroom and to examine the perceptions of participants concerning the nature of reading

and the meanings each individual constructs from the instruction. At the end of these two stages, I aimed to have a detailed description of Mrs. P and her classroom and of each child and his/her perspectives on reading and reading instruction as s/he experiences it. The goal of Stage Three was to engage in an across-case look at the perceptions of strugglers and succeeders, utilizing discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) as a tool. My purpose was to see how the students' perceptions compared with each other, as well as to look at contextual factors that may indicate why they perceive things as they do.

Immersion in the data is an essential component of data analysis (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and analysis must be done early in the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Prior to beginning formal analysis of the data, I read through the data record in its entirety, writing notes in the margins as if I were "conversing" with the data. According to Merriam (1998), talking back to the data in the form of questions and comments is an effective way of identifying some of the most salient aspects of the data record.

Effective data analysis is a recursive process, with a back and forth motion between concrete and abstract, induction and deduction, and description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). Each piece of data should be viewed in relation to others rather than being viewed in isolation (Merriam, 1998) for the purpose of creating a case of each student and then looking across cases for patterns that reflect similarities and differences in learners. After reading through the data in its entirety and making marginal notes, I chunked the data by drawing horizontal lines across the page to mark off meaningful units of information that related in some way to the research questions. Next, I assigned a number "1" or "2" to each chunk, to indicate that the chunk corresponded to Research

Question #1 or Research Question #2. Then I marked the right-hand side of each page with a label, along with an alpha-numeric tag that identified the source type and page number. (This was done to insure that the chunk could be contextualized as needed.)

Labels were developed by first considering the research questions and then by considering the themes that emerged from the pilot study data. The correspondence between the research questions and labels is shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Correspondence between Research Questions and Labels

Research Question	Labels
Research Question #1	
How do beginning readers perceive the nature of reading and what it means to be successful? How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?	Good Readers Self as Reader Reading Process How-To's Reading/Writing at Home Role of Print Independent Reading Reading Behaviors
Research Question #2	
What meanings do readers construct from beginning literacy experiences?	Guided Reading Read-alouds
What do beginners say is the purpose of various literacy activities?	Phonics Seatwork/Homework

Do these perceptions about beginning literacy experiences differ by ability level?	Writing
	Role of Print
	Independent Reading
	Reading Behaviors
	Metalinguistic/Metacognitive Awareness
	Helpful Instruction
	Participation in Group Literacy Activities

The data chunks, color-coded by student, which had been labeled and tagged, were sorted into file folders labeled as shown above. (Duplicate copies were made of data that fit into more than one category.)

Stage One: The context of the literacy learning. First, I examined the data record, including observation data, teacher interview data, and documents and artifacts with the goal of generating a description of literacy learning as it occurs in Mrs. P's classroom. Codes were developed by comparing the labels referring to Research Question #2 (Fig. 6) to the literature on exemplary first-grade/beginning reading instruction. I found that the labels corresponded closely with the literature, so in some cases, the label was also used as a code. Some labels were omitted because they referred specifically to the child's perception of the instruction, as opposed to the instruction itself, e.g., "Helpful Instruction". The following coding scheme was developed to facilitate the construction of a description of literacy learning in Mrs. P's classroom. (See Table 7.)

Table 7

Development of coding scheme for Stage One analysis: “Description of Literacy Learning in Mrs. P’s Classroom

Labels	Related Literature	Codes
Guided Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling & explicit instruction in comprehension strategies, e.g., “fix-ups” • Flexible grouping based on needs • Much practice with connected text • Reading and re-reading to improve fluency • Development of decoding skills and sight word recognition 	Modeling/Coaching Compreh Ins Grouping Connected Text Re-reading/Fluency Explicit Ins
Read-alouds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to multiple genres, formats, and levels • Use of good literature which is made accessible to students 	Read-alouds Shared Rdg Literature
Phonics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit, multi-faceted word study • Word identification through letter-sound correspondence, word parts, and context • Phonemic awareness instruction 	Word Study

Seatwork/Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent reading and writing practice • Authentic contexts and isolated skill instruction 	Indep Rdg/Wrtg
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link writing of words to reading of words • Much writing for personally meaningful purposes 	Writing
Independent Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide texts of interest below frustration level 	---
Metalinguistic/ Metacognitive Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher models strategy use • First-graders can learn these fix-ups when meaning breaks down: re-reading, predicting, questioning, contextualizing 	Meta
Participation in group literacy activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read a variety of texts in many different ways: individuals, partners, choral, etc. 	Modes

From: Morrow, 2005; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Teale & Yokota, 2000

Although the research questions did not address the “official script” of the classroom, i.e., the teacher’s intentions, I found that understanding Mrs. P’s intentions and her

perceptions of literacy instruction as she believed it should take place in first grade was an important starting place for contextualizing the children's perceptions. According to Gutierrez & Stone (2000), children's "counterscripts," i.e., the meanings they construct, can be very different from and in some cases be at odds with the official script.

I re-examined the data which had been chunked and organized in file folders according to label; I highlighted, assigned codes, and re-sorted the data. I then composed summaries of Mrs. P's beliefs about literacy instruction and of the literacy learning context in Mrs. P's classroom.

Next, I focused on the meanings each participant created from literacy instruction as experienced in this classroom. I began by analyzing the observation protocol data. Upon completion of all observations, observation protocol checklists were photocopied. One set was organized by date and one set was organized by student. Tallies were made of the frequency of the following behaviors for each student: looking toward teacher, looking toward text, looking toward peers, looking toward something other than the focus of instruction, hand-raising, and following text with eyes. Since not all categories were applicable during every observation (e.g., there may have been no opportunity for hand-raising during the instruction), the total numbers of observed behaviors vary for each category. The frequency of a particular behavior was divided by the total number of observed behaviors to get percentages that indicate how frequently particular behaviors were observed. (Because percentages were rounded, not all percentages add up to 100%.) So, for example, during 20% of the 15 minute segments, Alicia was observed to "often" follow the text with her eyes, during 13% of the 15 minute segments, she "sometimes" followed the text with her eyes, during 47% of the 15 minute segments she

“rarely” followed the text with her eyes, and during 20% of the 15 minute segments she “never” followed the text with her eyes. (Findings are displayed in Appendix E.)

In the first part of the stage, I read over the data record for each participant by date (Merriam, 1998). So for example, when beginning to look at Alicia, I collected all field notes, interview and observation transcripts, and documents, arranging them so I could see all the data sources that pertained to a particular day. Then I did the same for the next day, continuing on until I reached the data from Week 12. As I examined the data for each day for that particular child, I assigned codes that reflected the child’s views of instruction, including what it means to be successful. Next, using a deductive lens, I chunked the data to create a summary sheet (App. F) for each child that included a record of dominant themes present in the data record pertaining to the child’s understandings of literacy events as experienced in the classroom. Using a process of categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995), the chunked excerpts were examined for patterns. From the patterns, detailed descriptions of each participant as a literacy learner in this classroom were constructed.

Stage Two: The students’ belief systems. The data record was put back together and re-examined to construct an understanding of each participant’s belief systems about the nature of reading, as experienced both at home and at school. In this stage, I examined the data inductively, reading and re-reading the data record, highlighting parts that reflect participant’s views of reading and assigning more detailed codes. With the goal of this stage of analysis being the generating of a description of how each participant perceives the nature of reading and their instruction, I composed summaries of each student by focusing on the areas illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8.

Student Summaries

Research Question #1: Beliefs about the	Self-Perceptions
Nature of Reading	Literacy Across Contexts
	Success
	Decoding
	Engagement with Print
Research Question #2: Perceptions of	Attentiveness
Instruction	Positioning in “community”
	Participation
	Connections across Contexts
	Meanings: Routines
	Meanings: Independent Reading
	Meanings: Seatwork
	Meanings: Phonics
	Meanings: Guided Reading
	Meanings: Shared and Whole Class
	Reading
	Re-reading
	Oral Reading

In addition, I composed “Day in the Life” vignettes that reflect my perception of the literacy learning experiences of each participant. Composing these vignettes helped me to look at a day in the classroom through the eyes of the child.

Stage Three: Using discourse analysis as a tool for looking across cases. Finally, discourse analysis provided a means of looking across the cases to examine the differences between the perceptions of strugglers and succeeders concerning their views about the nature of reading and the meanings they constructed from literacy instruction in the classroom. Discourse analysis involves the use of a series of guiding questions designed to help the researcher explore the following: 1) the meanings of words and phrases as used by the speaker in a particular situation, 2) relationships between ideas expressed by one or several speakers, 3) the identities invoked by a language user, 4) the significance a language user attaches to various ideas, 5) the Discourse models enacted in a given context, and 6) the distribution of social goods within a shared community.

I began this phase of analysis by re-examining the interview transcripts and the students' responses to each interview question. I created a poster for each interview question on the protocol, posting the question at the top and attaching the color-coded transcripts which had been chunked and cut apart according to the question being referred to. Next, I reviewed the data record to note recurring words and phrases; I highlighted words and phrases that were: 1) repeated several times by one or more participants, 2) emphasized by a participant, and/or 3) directly related to my research questions. Following the highlighting, I composed responses to guiding questions proposed by Gee (2005) about situated meanings, Discourse models, and the "building tasks of language" (App. G) and notated transcript line numbers that supported my responses to each of these questions. Themes were identified that linked specifically to my research questions. I composed responses to each of the research questions by

attempting to allow the children's voices to speak for themselves and then elaborating on the responses in terms of the themes that emerged from Gee's guiding questions.

Validation of the Data

Creswell (1998) lists eight procedures that can be used to validate the findings. Three of these methods were employed in this study. First, I attempted to clarify researcher bias by recording my own reflections in a research journal during the study. In these reflective writings, I tried to uncover for myself my biases and the assumptions I hold which may have an impact on my understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The second method of validation was peer review (Creswell, 1998). I asked a fellow doctoral student to review my data twice during the research, and I kept notes of these sessions. First, she checked my coding scheme. She suggested that I construct charts to link the codes to the research questions and research base; these are reflected in Figures 7 and 8. Second, after I constructed the case descriptions, she was provided with copies of each child's interview transcript and the summaries I had constructed. She was asked to validate my interpretation of each child as a literacy learner. The only areas of discrepancy were with regard to the inclusion of information she considered extraneous. Upon reviewing her comments, I agreed that the information in question did not clearly link to the research questions and the information was deleted.

The third method of validation was triangulation, broadly defined by Creswell (1998) as "the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (p. 202). Patton (1990) explains the specific type used in this study, the triangulation of qualitative data sources:

This means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means *within qualitative methods*. It means (1)

comparing observational data with interview data; (2) comparing what people say in public with what they say in private; (3) checking for consistency of what people say about the same thing over time; and (4) comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view...It means validating information obtained through interviews by checking program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report (p. 467).

In this study, I checked semi-formal with informal interview data for consistency, allowing me to look at responses to similar questions in different contexts and at different times. Interview data was compared with observational data, including data from the protocols. Classroom artifacts, such as work samples provided another means of cross-checking. For example, as children showed me things they had written, I could gain a sense of the purposes for which they used print. This was compared with what they said about why people read and write. At times, children's responses to questions were inconsistent, such as how they felt about their own success as readers. According to Patton (1990), differences in the information obtained from different sources do not necessarily invalidate the information but more likely indicates that different phenomenon have been recorded, in which case, it is the researcher's responsibility to try make sense of the differences. By looking at the context in which the question was asked, I was able to see possible reasons for differences in children's responses.

Summary of Methodology

The purpose of this case study of two struggling and two successful beginning readers is to paint portraits that show the perceptions children hold about the nature of reading and the meanings they construct from their literacy learning experiences, and to compare the perceptions of strugglers and succeeders. Consistent with the theoretical frame that informs this study, data was collected from a variety of sources, including observations, interviews, and artifacts, with the goal of contextualizing the perceptions of the

participants. Analysis occurred in three stages, including a description of literacy learning as experienced in Mrs. P's classroom, a description of the literacy belief system of each participant, and a look across cases at the differences in the perceptions of strugglers and succeeders. Validation methods included researcher journaling, peer review, and triangulation. In what follows I present detailed portraits of each student's beliefs about the nature of reading and their perceptions of learning to read in Mrs. P's first grade classroom.

CHAPTER 4

CASE DESCRIPTIONS: FOUR BEGINNING LITERACY LEARNERS

If children are to achieve common outcomes after two or three years in school it will be necessary to recognize that they enter school having learned different things in different ways in different cultures and communities. I assume that what one already knows is important in determining what one will come to know and, if teachers believe that, they would search for what each new entrant to school, or any slow-to-get-started learner, already knows about how one can learn (Clay, 1998; p. 1)

In this study of the perceptions of beginning readers, I make the assumption that each child comes into the classroom “having learned different things in different ways” and that what each brings to the classroom in terms of understandings and ways of making sense of the world will have an influence on the meaning s/he constructs as a literacy learner in Mrs. P’s first grade classroom. This study is informed by a socioconstructivist frame in which children’s thinking is viewed as shaped by interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1985) in a community of shared practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Out-of-school literacy practices, which are not always valued in schools (Street & Street, 1991), have been shown to impact a child’s ability to succeed with in-school literacy learning (Heath, 1983). In addition, Dyson (1993) has demonstrated that children do not leave their “outside worlds” at home, but that they bring such experiences into the classroom as they find their way into print.

Thus, the description of each participant presented in this chapter is not only an attempt to construct a portrait that reflects his/her beliefs about the nature of reading and

his/her practices as a member of this classroom community, but also, to the extent that it is possible within the parameters of this study, to situate the child's perceptions within his/her background of experience. (A cross-case look at the participants as strugglers and succeeders is presented in Chapter 5.)

Julie: A Succeeder

Situating Julie

Julie, a middle-SES Caucasian girl of six, is friendly, reflective, and talkative. When I engaged Julie in discussion, she typically paused, wrinkled her forehead as if deep in thought, and then began talking faster than I could write, prompting me to insure that I took the audio recorder whenever I talked with her. Mrs. P considers Julie one of her strongest literacy students and is particularly impressed with Julie's writing ability. Though the curriculum does not allow for a great deal of creative work, Julie's writing samples exhibit original thought, as well as efforts toward correctness of form. In a letter to Santa that was displayed in the hallway with other such letters, Julie wrote:

Dear Santa,

I have a special wish for the whole wide world. My wish is no more loney (lonely) kids or puppies.

Merry Christmas

See you soon.

Love, Julie.

Julie's letters are carefully and correctly formed, with her letters filling the proper spaces of the primary-ruled handwriting paper. She illustrates her work with whimsical drawings whenever this is allowed and/or encouraged.

Julie's kindergarten teacher was interviewed to gain insight into Julie's family background. Mrs. G reports that Julie comes from a large family comprised of a stay-at-

home mother, father, one older sister, and three younger brothers. When asked about the parents' level of education, the teacher said she did not know for sure. She indicated, however, that Julie's academic success seemed somewhat surprising in light of her knowledge of the parents and Julie's older sister. "The kids are often out of control when in public," said Mrs. G. "I would describe the parents as very lax. The older sister was a serious behavior issue." However, Mrs. G described Julie as one of her best students. "She is very self-motivated and sets her own structure. I don't think it is imposed on her," said Mrs. G. The teacher reported that Julie came in "ready to read," knowing her letters, sounds, and some sight words." However, she attributed this knowledge more to Julie's love for playing school with her sister, rather than parental support. Mrs. G said that Julie frequently came in without her homework or the books she was supposed to bring. "I got the impression that Julie was responsible for her own homework," said Mrs. G.

Julie reported that her father is a mechanic and that she did not think her mother or father attended college. She did not recall either of them having jobs other than what they are presently doing. Julie said her family has "regular family time" on Friday nights when they go out to dinner or watch a movie together. She said they often "go somewhere fun" after church on Sundays, such as the pool. She said they also go to the "the kids' museum," and they have visited a local zoo. She said they sometimes visit the library. During free time, in addition to playing school, Julie likes to help her mom cook, watch *Arthur* and *Curious George* on TV, and play outside.

As an additional source of information about Julie's home life, I asked her to bring three artifacts, i.e., special things from home that she would like to tell me about. As she

pulled the first item out of the bag, a photo of a toddler, I was, indeed, glad for the audio recorder to capture her “chatter-without-a-breath” enthusiasm:

J: This is my baby “brottaw” (brother). He’s the cutest thing in the whole world. I love babies! He’s 12 months. I have a big “sistaw”. She’s 9. I have a little brottaw; he’s faw (four). My biggest brottaw is 16. And my mom and my dad and all of us live in a big house.

I: What do you do with your baby brother?

J: I play with him and sometimes when mom is cooking dinnaw the baby keeps cwawling or walking into the kitchen but there’s a wug for our dog, a Chihuahua, and my mom doesn’t want him on there and cwawling around on the floor so I have to watch him. And he just got two little teeth and sometimes he falls and I have to pick him up. And you know what I noticed? He’s getting curls. He’s getting curls in his haiw!

I include this brief exchange, because it illustrates Julie’s intense desire to connect with others verbally in spite of some speech difficulties (for which she receives weekly services and which, for the sake of clarity, I will not attempt to recreate in subsequent transcripts). In addition, Julie’s way of framing her description of the items in her bag suggests the kinds of conversations that may take place in her home. She references the family pet not by its name or the generic term “dog” or “puppy” but by its breed—“Chihuahua.” Likewise, her baby brother’s age is referred to in specific terms, “twelve months,” and she knows the ages of each of her other siblings.

Julie brought two additional items in her bag, which she again referred to in specific terms: a yellow blanket, her “security blanket,” and her “creative kit,” a flannel tote bag with a tablet, crayons, and a pencil sharpener. Describing the kit, Julie said:

J: I call it my creative kit. I have a pad of paper and I think I have pencils. No, they are missing. I have a pencil sharpener, no, no pencils....I use it, like I take it for—I’m a really good draw-er so I use it for if I have to write anything down or if I play with my stuffed animals and I have to write something. And if I have nothing to do and I feel like drawing I just take this out and start drawing.

Julie explained that someone had given the bag to her on a trip to Georgia to visit relatives and, “I decided to call it my creative kit,” she said. On the tablet, about five pages had drawings in black crayon of rainbows and people. She had also drawn a picture of her family and labeled each.

During our semi-structured interview, I asked Julie about her family. She described her older sister as having “tons of Junie B. books” that she passed on to Julie because her sister had gotten too old for them. When asked if anyone read at her house, Julie said, “My sister reads way too much. She never wants to play with me. She always wants to read...My mom and dad at night read to me and I read to my baby brother.”

Julie seemed to see literacy as an integral part of her “free time” at home. She reported watching three shows after school, all of which feature literary characters: “Then I ask my mom if I can watch my shows ‘cause my shows come on after school. There’s *Arthur*, *Curious George*, and *Clifford*, too...” She knows that these characters are literary in nature and uses her knowledge from both TV and books to make inferences about the characters, as indicated by her reference to her knowledge of “Arthur” when asked to make a prediction about a story Mrs. P was reading aloud: “I bet they will make fun of him because they always make fun of Arthur. I know because I have watched every one of the Arthur shows after school and that always happens.”

The data record suggests that while Julie may or may not get direct academic support from her parents, the family promotes literacy development by providing a literacy-rich environment, including many experiences with books, and by communicating the value of reading. Though home may not be a place of strict structure and discipline, some routines are in place, and perhaps where there are none, Julie creates her own.

Julie reported that she attended preschool at the ages of 4 and 5. She attended full-day kindergarten and started first grade at the age of 6 years and 9 months.

On assessments of LNF and LSF, Julie scored 56 and 46, respectively. These scores are considered at benchmark. Aside from the other succeeder, who outscored other students on all measures, Julie's scores were the highest across all assessment measures, including the DRA. On measures of the subskills of reading, Julie scored at the 90th percentile or above in all categories except PSF, in which she scored at the 29th percentile. These scores suggest that overall, Julie has been consistently successful in her performance on the literacy-related assessments she has been given.

Julie's Beliefs about the Nature of Reading

Echoing Mrs. P, Julie describes good reading as that which is "...loud and clear so she (Mrs. P) can hear you and you have to do the best reading you can and if you come to a word you don't know you have to look at the picture, sound it out, chunk it, try again, or skip it."

Julie attributes success, at least in part, to the use of these word recognition strategies. In addition, she says:

Saxon Phonics, which is really boring, but it helps you to read. In Saxon Phonics she (Mrs. P) gives us words and asks them to code it and when they're done coding it they have to say the word...if you say the word you know it right in your head. You take a picture of it like right and you remember it...Well coding doesn't much help you read the word but it shows like what if you putted letters together how they make stuff. Like if a vowel has a consonant behind it then that means you have to code it with a breve so they know it's a short a that's so it says /a/...it doesn't really help me 'cause I already know...(giggles)'Cause I'm so smart!

Julie's responses suggest that she attributes much of her success to Mrs. P's instruction, and to the reading and re-reading of books in Guided Reading.

Julie believes that learning to read initially takes some effort, but then gets easier:

I: Pretend you were my teacher and I didn't know how to read. What would you tell me?

J: I'd tell you—um—I'd start you out with easy words then medium words then when you're really good, I'd end with really big words.

I: Oh—but what would I do with those easy words?

J: Sound them out.

I: How would I do that?

J: (*pointing to the word "best" written on a banner on the wall*) you say the sound it makes b-e-s-t and put it together, "best".

Consistent with Mrs. P's view of success in beginning reading, Julie sees herself as "a reader," largely, it seems, based on her ability to decode words independently and to read fluently. However, Julie has found her own enjoyment in reading, which takes her beyond Mrs. P's emphasis on word recognition skills. Julie was frequently observed leaning back in her chair, legs crossed, with a book on her lap. As she read, she shared parts of her books with Mrs. P (who often asked her to share parts with the class) and her peers. Julie often read with paper and pencil nearby. When asked about her writing, she replied that she was intending to share it with someone else later or that it was something she wanted to remember. This suggests that she is not merely decoding words, but that reading is a personally meaningful process.

Julie sees decoding as, on occasion, a necessary part of the process of figuring out unknown words. Though she considers instruction in decoding boring, she says that "when you're done coding...they have to say the word," suggesting that the coding process is a tool that can be used to read words. However, Julie is clear in her belief that coding is simply that—a tool to be used discriminately. When asked about a homework assignment in which she had to code words, she said, "I don't need to code it...I already know how (to read it) but we have to." Julie referred to decoding as a tool that was

helpful to others: “You don’t need to code if you know how to read and I know how to read and I don’t need to code it.”

When Julie talked about the process of decoding, she used the language of instruction. For example, she used terms like “breve,” “macron,” and “digraph.” Although she recited rules that she had learned like “If the vowel is short, code it with a breve,” I did not observe her having occasion to apply the rules. Perhaps her contention that Saxon Phonics helps you to “take a picture of it right and remember it” is indicative of how Saxon Phonics helps her as a good reader; that is to say that it helps her to see patterns within the words, hence her contention that “I don’t need to code it, I just sound it out.”

During my observations and conversations with Julie, she indicated that she sees print serving multiple functions, as illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9

Julie’s Perceptions of the Functions of Print

Functions	Evidence
A source of direction, information, authority, and learning	On 3 occasions (two different seatwork tasks on 1/2/08; one learning center 12/12/07) when asked to explain a task, she began with “It says...” referring to the printed directions; read sentence on back of flashcard as a way of settling a dispute over the identification of a word as she tutored a struggler (11/7/07); used <i>Rattle Your Bones</i> to learn how to draw (11/28/07).

A source of communication	Reference to mother communicating with Mrs. P in writing about homework completion: “Like things from school she has to sign...like the name of the book and the date and all that when we bring home our Saxon Phonics readers.” (<i>interview</i>)
The instructional focus during literacy learning	Julie privileged print over the teacher as indicated by her attention as she watched students code words at the easel (<i>See Ch. 3, Table 6</i>)
A source of a meaningful message	Independent reading of books she enjoyed (observed each day of the study; interview data suggests this occurs at home as well); “This book tells you how (to draw)” she said when asked why she selected a particular book (11/28/07).
A source of pleasure, enjoyment, and amusement	Observation of facial expressions during independent reading, basal, reader’s theater, and the decodable reader (observed each day of the study)
A means of keeping records	A list of boys’ names was kept on a poster to indicate which ones had “bought” drawings from the girls during an indoor

	recess.
A catalyst for sharing ideas with others	Observed work with a friend to use book to learn to draw (11/28/07); observed work with a friend to find interesting information in the dictionary (1/2/08).

Drawing upon observations of others, Julie perceives print as useful in many ways. For example, when I asked Julie to provide a sample of the kind of writing she does at home, she began to compose the kind of letter she would write to parents when playing school at home. (See Figure 10.) She explained the letter as follows:

T: What kinds of things do you write?

J: Like sometimes when I play school I'm the teacher and my big dolls and my stuffed animals are the students and I have to send home some letters to their parents sometimes, like if we're going on a field trip, if we're—

T: Do you write those letters out?

J: Yup, I actually do. I write them in my room.

T: Can you show me?

Demonstrates how she writes at home. She has used her finger to space the words as she writes a "letter" to the parents of her school students.

T: Can you read that for me?

J: We are going to the zoo for a field trip on Friday.

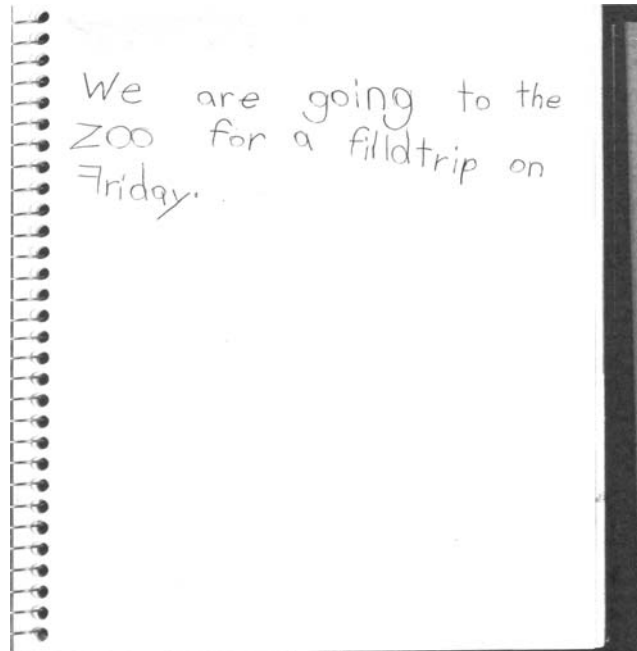


Figure 1. Julie's field trip letter.

While the enjoyment of print Julie has experienced at home may contribute to the positive outlook she has on reading and writing at school, she also seems to draw upon knowledge gained in school, both implicitly and explicitly, as indicated by her use of finger spaces and the content of a letter to parents, to enhance her own literacy-related experiences at home. This is consistent with Rowsell's (2006) view of literacy practices in and out of school, wherein each informs the other:

There is a danger in viewing the home as an isolated domain or container that we enter and exit. Instead, I prefer to see the relationship between home and school—or more broadly, out-of-school and in-school—as fluid. These contexts move in and out of each other and bear traces of the other all the time (p. 10).

Julie appears to move effortlessly from one environment to the other, bringing pieces of her home literacy practices with her as she crosses the “borders.” Overall, Julie sees print as a source of both entertainment and information and as a means of communication for her own purposes, both at home and at school.

Enactment of Beliefs: Julie's Perceptions of Instruction

Morning routines and shared reading. Julie's arrival at school is characterized by smiles, attention to routine tasks, and chatting with friends. In my field notes on 10/17/07

I wrote:

Julie came into the classroom in an animated mood. As she waited for a copy to be made of a coloring page she needed, she sang, "la, la, la," softly to herself in a playful way. Julie sat down at her desk with the coloring page and appeared to confer with the girl next to her about the task, pointing to the page...

Julie not only appears at home in Mrs. P's classroom, but she is focused and attentive.

Later that morning, when called to the easel area, Julie seated herself near the front center of the group. This became her pattern--close to both teacher and sources of print. As Mrs. P directed the group's reading of the various charts for opening exercises, I recorded in my field notes: "The class is called over to the easel area for opening exercises; a student points to the words of songs and poems on chart paper as the class reads/recites in unison....Julie appeared to keep her eyes on the charts throughout..."

Julie's observation protocol data indicates that during 23 of 25 fifteen-minute observations, she was "sometimes" or "often" focused on the teacher when it was appropriate to do so. She was focused on text 100% of the time, when it was appropriate to do so. During my observations of Julie at the easel area during whole group literacy instruction, the few times she did appear distracted from the instruction itself, the focus of her attention was the print in the room, such as the chart used for shared reading.

Julie found humor and enjoyment in many of the literacy activities she participated in during the course of the day, and the routine re-reading of charts and poems during opening exercises was no exception. Describing Julie's participation during opening exercises, specifically the singing of songs and re-reading of poems—perhaps rote and repetitious to some—I recorded in my field notes on 12/12/07, "Julie tends to make

facial expressions that suggest she is deep in thought as she reads (the charts with the group)—furrowed brow, smiles, puzzlement.” Her expressions seemed appropriate given the context, suggesting that she is thoughtful about the meaning of text even as she engages in routine activities with print.

In addition to finding meaning and enjoyment in picture books and leveled readers, Julie discovered meaning and enjoyment in the shared reading of decodable readers by adding her own voices and facial expressions to the text. During a whole group reading lesson, Mrs. P distributed the decodable readers that accompany the basal series. She also distributed highlighters which students use to find words with the target phonetic pattern. Though the stories have a beginning, middle, and end, they are contrived for the purpose of providing practice with emerging word recognition skills. Julie, however, approached the task with her characteristic enthusiasm for print of any kind. I recorded in my notes on 10/3/07:

Students are directed to get highlighters (to mark word family words). Upon getting her supplies, Julie returns to her seat and begins reading the reader on her own. At one point, she whispers to her neighbor and points to the text with a little giggle. First Mrs. P leads the class in a picture walk. Then Mrs. P leads the class in choral reading; Julie can be heard above the other voices, reading with great expression. As they complete each page, Mrs. P asks students to find a word on the page with a short a. Julie’s hand and others go up. Julie highlights words with the common vowel pattern, as the class is directed to do so. The class is asked how many times an –ap word appears on a particular page. Again, Julie’s hand goes up. Mrs. P directs the class to go back to the beginning of the story a third time. This time, students can volunteer a “voice”—happy, sad, scared, etc. in which the class is to read chorally. Julie not only adds voice, but also facial expression to this activity.

I suspect that Julie adopted the voice and facial expressions from this commonly occurring activity and made them her own, enhancing her own reading experiences. Nearly every time I observed Julie reading independently, I noticed that, although much of her reading was silent or at a whisper, at some point she added facial expressions and

expressively voiced at least a line or two from the text. It seems that Julie is able to take the instruction she experiences and utilize it for her own purposes.

Seatwork and homework. Prior to beginning opening exercises, when the students had time to work on seatwork or center activities, Julie served as “tutor”, appointed by Mrs. P to review sight words on a ring with a less capable reader. Julie encouraged her “pupil,” who was easily distracted, much as a teacher would: “Come on ____, we’re almost finished. We just have to do this one more time.” When the student misread a word and insisted that he was correct, she proceeded to read the sentence prompt from the back of the card: “No, _____. It says right here...” These examples suggest that Julie displays confidence in the text and her abilities to make sense of it. Perhaps more important, though, they suggest that Julie has appropriated and uses school practices as taught by Mrs. P.

Julie proved a capable tour guide when I asked her to explain the literacy-related centers in the classroom as well as seatwork she had been given. Julie began her introduction with “Well, it says here...” and then she read the directions. Mrs. P includes printed directions on nearly all center activities and seatwork papers. For example, in the Pocket Chart Center, students do a spelling-related craft and each step of the directions is printed on a sentence strip. Reading each of the following steps to me, Julie pointed to the words, and then stepped aside to show me the corresponding materials and how they were to be used:

Autumn Apple Tree
Pocket Chart Center #4

1. Trace and cut out a brown trunk.
2. Trace and cut out a green leafy section.
3. Trace and cut out five red apples.
4. Glue the leafy section to the trunk.

5. Glue the apples to the tree.

When I asked Julie to explain a worksheet during my last observation, she said, “Well, you have to read the directions, but I don’t need to because I already know what to do.” Julie views print as containing a meaningful message, one critical to succeeding in Mrs. P’s classroom, but she has also learned to attend discriminately.

One morning I asked Julie to explain to me what she had done for homework during the previous evening. As she did so, she said, “Oh, I forgot to do this.” Apparently she realized that she had forgotten to complete a handwriting page. This incident suggests that perhaps Julie is expected to complete her homework independently and is not relying on the help of other family members to do so. This is consistent with the kindergarten teacher’s belief that Julie was responsible for her own homework in kindergarten. Although Julie had to be reminded on one occasion to bring back the books she was assigned to re-read for homework, in general, she seemed to complete the work on time and correctly.

Large group reading instruction. As Julie participated in large group reading activities, she seemed to draw readily on her personal, out-of-school literacy-related experiences. For example, when Mrs. P introduced the sight word “been,” she asked if anyone knew the word. Julie’s hand shot into the air. When called on, she said, “I know that word from my Junie B book.” Like Julie’s prediction about the *Arthur* book based on her knowledge of the TV show, Julie also made a text-to-text connection when Mrs. P was reading a story aloud in which a witch threatens to eat the children:

Mrs. P: What story does this remind you of?

(Several children gave incorrect responses.)

J: That’s like Hansel and Gretel, ‘cause the witch puts the children into the oven.

Such responses suggest that Julie draws upon her personal literacy experiences to make text-to-text connections across mediums and contexts.

Regarding participation during whole class reading instruction, Julie's hand-raising was recorded in the observation protocols as occurring "often" or "sometimes" during all of the focused observations; she often wiggled her hand in the air, indicating her desire to be called upon. Her hand was usually among the first to go up. I noted in my field notes on 12/12/07, "As flash cards were flipped, Julie appears to mouth the words or sounds lightly before the rest of the group." This suggests that she engages with the text rather than being dependent on oral language as a prompt for reading. As further confirmation of Julie's persistent engagement with text in a variety of contexts, I recorded in my field notes (1/2/08) Julie's behavior during a reader's theater performance of a story in a basal: "As a student hesitated on a word, Julie immediately looked up from her own text toward the speaker." This shift in attention suggests that Julie had been following along, even though she was not one of the readers.

Oral reading. Reading aloud is, to Julie, an opportunity to perform. When Julie shared with Mrs. P a funny story she had been reading, Mrs. P called upon her to share the story with the class by reading it aloud. Julie read fluently and expressively, hardly able to contain her giggles over references to Santa's underwear. Julie easily assumed the role she was given by Mrs. P as "more capable peer" in the classroom literacy community, eagerly sharing with others the meaning she had constructed for herself. In addition to her expressive reading for her classmates, Julie also viewed oral reading at home a way of "performing" for parents. According to Julie, "...before you read it to your mom or dad, you gotta make sure you're good at reading the book."

Self-selected reading. Mrs. P provides many opportunities for students to engage with good books for their own enjoyment. Julie appears to make the most of this time, sometimes reading by herself and sometimes sharing books with others. Julie's enjoyment of text is apparent in her physical posture during reading. When given the opportunity, she selects the teacher's easel chair and usually leans back comfortably in the large chair, with one leg crossed over the other. When reading independently while seated at her desk, she also tends to lean back and cross her legs. This is in contrast to the upright posture she assumes when she does her other seatwork or when she sits on the floor for group instruction.

Julie seems to find a great deal of enjoyment in classroom literacy experiences, but she especially seems to like reading on her own. Describing Julie's behaviors during independent reading time, I wrote in my field notes on 10/3/07:

Julie picks up the pumpkin book from the rack on the way to her seat, but returns it to the rack after paging through quickly. She takes the basal out of her desk and begins reading to herself. She smiles as she turns pages. She mouths the words and seems intent on the story.

Learning to recognize words. Julie has her own views about the phonics instruction she experiences:

I: You had mentioned Saxon Phonics. That it helps you and you have to code the words. How does coding help you?

J: Well, coding doesn't much help you read the word but, it shows like what if you putted letters together how they make stuff. Like if a vowel has a consonant behind it then that means you have to code it with breve so they know it's a short a that's so it says /a/.

I: Oh, I see, does that help you to know the sound?

J: Yeah, it doesn't really help me 'cause I already know (*laughs*)... 'Cause I'm so smart!

Julie again contends that phonics instruction is not helpful to her, personally:

I: Does it (coding) help you?

J: No.

I: Oh, why do you think Mrs. P does it?

J: I don't know. You don't need to code if you know how to read and I know how to read and I don't need to code it.

I: Do you think Mrs. P thinks you need to do this to learn how to read?

J: Yeah, but I think you should just sound it out, not code it.

Julie, who stated during our interview, “the only time I really read is at nighttime, before I go to bed, ‘cause we have to have lights out at nine but I don’t really fall asleep until about an hour and a half later...” brings with her some understanding of the need to follow routines imposed by adults—whether they make sense to her or not. Julie explains that although she may think phonics is repetitious and uninteresting, it may serve some purpose:

I: Tell me about some of the things Mrs. P does to help you be a good reader, Julie.

J: Well, in Saxon Phonics, which is really boring, but it helps you to read. In Saxon Phonics she gives us words and asks them to code it and when they’re done coding it they have to say the word.

I: How does that help you to be a good reader?

J: Because if they say the word you know it right in your head. You take one picture of it like right and you remember it...And if there’s a vowel that’s not that doesn’t have a consonant follow it, like go, there’s an o you have to put a consonant you have to put an accent, immediately put an accent.

These exchanges suggest that, not only is Julie able to talk about linguistic concepts, but that she finds purpose even in instruction she considers “boring” and sometimes unnecessary for her personally. She is, however, drawn to the print that is a part of phonics instruction. When Mrs. P put words on the white board during phonics instruction, I recorded in my field notes on 12/12/07, “Julie watched the easel as a volunteer coded the word ‘shell,’ which had been written after (the group) echoing (of a list of dictated words). When Mrs. P got off on a tangent as a student asked a question about something unrelated to the instruction, I wrote, “Julie continued to focus on the easel where the student was coding,” suggesting the persistence of Julie’s engagement

with print and the privileging of “print over person”—even when the person is the teacher.

Small group reading. To Julie, the most salient aspect of guided reading seems to be engaging with the text itself. In fact, Julie claims that the opportunities for the reading of connected text, in guided reading most beneficial for her own growth as a reader:

I: How does reading in your reading group help you, Julie?” I asked.

J: It helps us because we read a lot in our reading group, so it helps us learn how to read.

Perhaps most important, guided reading provided yet another opportunity for Julie to engage with print. In fact, print seemed to call so loudly to Julie that it was hard to distract her when she was engaged with text. One day as her guided reading group had the opportunity to finish reading the story and completing their written response on the floor, Julie was stepped over by three students (and nearly stepped on); however, I noted in my field notes on 10/17/07 that, “She didn’t even look up. Her eyes remained glued to the reader.”

Making sense of texts. Not only does Julie construct her own purposes, but she also focuses on meaning in the instruction. Responding to my request for an explanation of the task on a fill-in-the-blank worksheet, she said, “We had to read the directions and circle the word you think it is and then you put it over here. You have to read it, ‘I love’ and you see which one makes sense.” In addition, during self-selected reading time, Julie often interacted in meaningful and somewhat creative ways with the books she read. Sometimes she simply read a book with great expression and intermittent giggles. Other times, she used the book as a springboard for activity. For example, over the course of three weeks of observations, Julie selected the book on how to draw that Mrs. P had

shared with the class. Julie, joined by a friend, read the directions in the book, and drew pictures in attempts to copy the figures in the text. On another occasion, near the end of the study, Julie selected a children's dictionary from the classroom bookshelf. I noticed that she was writing as she read and asked her to tell me about her selection. Julie explained her activity as follows:

T: Can you tell me about what you are reading?

J: I'm writing information.

T: Oh, what kind of information?

J: Information about ears (points) and stuff and I write it down.

T: Oh, how do you decide what to write?

J: Well, right here, I copy it down.

T: Do you know what that says?

J: Earn. (*She reads def then explains the picture*) The boy is earning money.

T: You are right, he is earning money. Have you used this book before?

J: No.

T: How did you learn how to use this book?

J: (Laughs) It's easy. I just did it.

T: Oh, you just taught yourself, huh?

J: Well, nobody had to teach me but my friend showed me.

T: What kind of stuff is in here?

J: Well, like, it says—oh, let me show you, this is really funny.

J: Look at this, "anything". *Reads def*: "anything means any thing" *and sentence*: "My brother will eat anything." (*laughs*)

Julie was able to take a text designed primarily for expository purposes and find her own meaning and enjoyment in it.

Summary of Julie's Perceptions about Reading and Learning to Read in Mrs. P's

Classroom

Julie comes to Mrs. P's classroom having demonstrated consistent growth as a literacy learner. Julie's parents do many things that facilitate Julie's ability to succeed, such as reading to her regularly (Durkin, 1966) and providing time and resources for imaginative play (Pellegrini & Galda, 2000). Julie perceives reading as a source of both information and pleasure. She is attentive to print both at home and at school and seems drawn to it.

She views reading as a process of decoding for the purpose of gaining a meaningful message for information or enjoyment, i.e., to Julie, reading always has a referential nature. She either recognizes words or decodes them using phonics skills. Decoding, however, always involves the putting back together of the sounds to form a word. Julie perceives her instruction as useful in furthering her abilities as a reader. Phonics, though not always necessary for her, is a useful tool for unlocking the meaning of words she does not automatically recognize. Thus, Julie's perceptions of reading and her instruction are consistent with the official script of the classroom, in all of its complexity. Julie views reading as a process of constructing meaning from text and she sees instruction in recognizing words as a necessary part of becoming a proficient meaning-maker. But Julie is also a lover of reading who finds Mrs. P's classroom, a rich resource in its variety of interesting texts, an extension of her out-of-school literacy experiences.

Mark: A Succeeder

Situating Mark

Mark, a middle-SES Caucasian boy of six, is a quiet and slightly shy student. Though he was always cooperative and appeared thoughtful and reflective, when I asked him questions about his activities, his responses were brief and to the point—in stark contrast to Julie's talkativeness.

According to Mrs. P, "Mark comes from a family where education is valued." As a way of gaining some insight about Mark and his family background, I interviewed his kindergarten teacher. Mrs. G reported that Mark's parents had registered Mark for kindergarten early, but withdrew the registration because they did not feel he was socially mature enough. Mrs. G said that proved to be a good decision, because even when Mark

entered kindergarten a year later, he was “socially backward and lacking in confidence.” However, Mrs. G reported that Mark was very bright and “already a reader,” though his tendency was to read fast rather than fluently with expression and appropriate pauses. She also said his comprehension was well behind his word recognition abilities and that he struggled a bit with writing due to his lack of confidence.

Mrs. G said Mark blossomed in kindergarten. Though still quiet and not a risk-taker, he gained confidence and social skills and improved in both reading and writing. (At the end of first grade, Mark had the lead part in the class play, sang a solo, and said his career goal was “to be the next American Idol.”) Mrs. G said Mark’s parents were always supportive of academics and school activities, often volunteering to help with class parties and other events. She also said the family travels a good deal and that Mark came to kindergarten with a rich background of experience.

As an additional way of understanding Mark’s home life, I asked him to bring in three things that were special to him from home. He was given a paper shopping bag that was 24”x 14”. When he entered the classroom in the morning, he brought the bag to me and seemed excited to share his artifacts. “I brought them!” he said. I informally interviewed him about the items he had selected.

I: Mark, what did you bring in your “important bag”?

M: (*showing me a photo of his mother, father, and two sisters*) I brought my family at Disney.

I: Why is your photo important to you?

M: ‘Cause its my family and I usually spend time with them.

I: Tell me about your trip to Disney World.

M: I think it was in September.

I: What did you do there?

M: We did the Halloween Party.

This exchange illustrates Mark's tendency to get right to the point without elaboration. His responses also illustrate his tendency to frame his responses in complete sentences rather than one-word or phrase answers.

Mark's second item was a Wii game, which he described as, "You build stuff and you ride it. You build rides... You just build rides and you walk around and play games and stuff." His third item was a Webkin. Describing the stuffed toy, he said, "You go online with them and you do fun games and stuff like that... You get to hunt for gems and do jobs." I asked him if the jobs, which he had listed as "like a babysitter, or a cook or a deliverer," were real. He laughed and said, "No." He said he liked to play on the computer at home.

The interview data suggests that Mark's family spends time together and that reading and writing in a variety of text forms are a part of their regular family experiences. Mark reported that his two older sisters, in fourth and sixth grades, read "big books" at home. He also reported that one of his sisters made a board game based on the Harry Potter book she read:

I: What kinds of things do you do (with your family)?

M: Sometimes we play games.

I: What kinds of games do you play?

M: We play Monopoly and my other sister in 5th grade, she made up a game and we play that a lot... There's four houses you can go in, one can be Hufflepuff, and one can be Gryffindore, and another can be (*inaudible*) and if you land on a regular space, you take a Hogwarts card and then you have to figure out the problem.

Mark said the whole family played the game, which apparently involved the creating of non-traditional texts, i.e., a board game with cards, which were enjoyed by the family together. Another type of text the family reads and writes is music. When asked about

reading and writing at home, Mark mentioned his sisters reading chapter books, but also his parents' writing of music:

I: What kinds of things do they (parents and sisters) write?

M: Um, sometimes they write songs and stuff...Because when all my other family comes, they sing it for them."

Mark mentioned his own piano lessons when asked about after-school activities. He said, "Well, I have to practice piano sometimes because I take piano lessons and when I get home from school I have to practice." This suggests that Mark has a sense of routines that are followed at home, as well as some experience "decoding" musical text.

Mark said he enjoys reading Dr. Seuss books at home. He sees reading at home and school as being "the same" because he sometimes reads the same books in both places. However, when asked about writing, he said that in school he writes "about things we did," whereas at home he writes "stories." When asked to write something like he would write at home, he wrote two sentences that appeared to be the beginning of a narrative. See Figure 2.

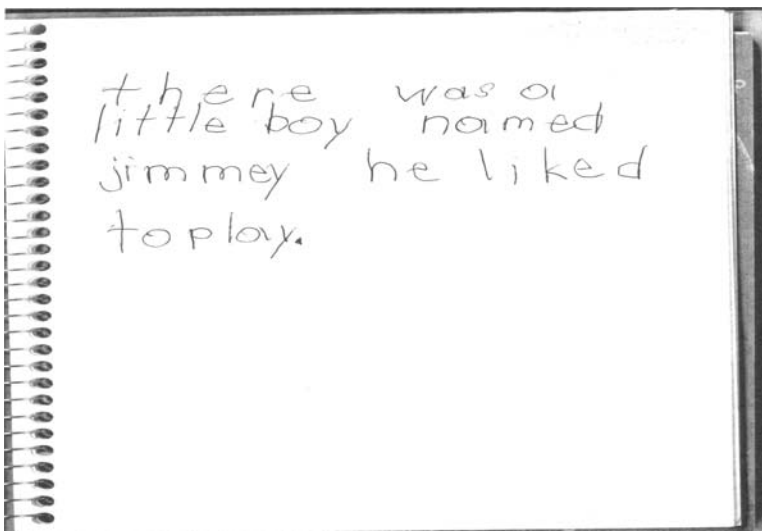


Figure 2. Mark's Story.

Mark's "story" appears to be a fictional narrative. He has introduced a character; the time and place are nondescript but from the tense seems set at a point in the past. It seems that Mark has begun to retell an event that could have happened in the real world. When he read it to me, he paused between the two phrases, though he used punctuation only at the end. This differs from the journal writing I observed in Mrs. P's class, as that was focused on events that occurred earlier in the day.

Mark noted similarities in the kinds of support he received in both home and school contexts. He mentioned his parents telling him to "sound it out or chunk it or something" if he came to a word he did not know. Though Mark may not be aware of similarities between learning to read and learning to play music, it seems that his reference to his parents writing musical text suggests that he has some sense of the connection between print and musical literacy.

As a third source of information about Mark's family and out-of-school experiences, I conducted an informal interview with Mark. He said both parents attended college and both work; his mother works at Waldenbooks and his father at Verizon. He said his mom reads to him at night and that his family often goes places together. He mentioned hiking in the woods, Disney World, a museum, a zoo, and the local library. During free time, Mark likes to swim in the family's pool or play games with his sisters.

- Mark sees himself as a good reader, but only indirectly refers to himself as such.
- I: Tell me about someone you know who's a good reader.
- M: Probably Preston.
- I: What is it about Preston's reading that makes him a good reader?
- M: He does big words sometimes.
- I: Do you do big words?
- M: Yeah.
- I: How do you "do big words?"

M: Well, there's five things that Mrs. P helps us about. One thing is chunking, where you do one sound then the next sound. The second one is try again, the third one sound it out, the fifth one—I don't know what that one is.

Mark seems to give credit to Mrs. P for his success as a reader.

Data in Mark's cumulative file indicates that he attended a church preschool for two years, attended full-day kindergarten, and entered first grade at the age of 7 years and 1 month.

On benchmark assessments administered in both kindergarten and first grade, Mark's scores distinguish him as performing well above most other students at his grade level. His scores in LNF and LSF at the beginning of first grade were 80 and 70, respectively. He outscored the next highest scoring student in LNF by 10 points and in LSF by 13 points, but those scores were not achieved by the same student. Mark also scored at level 12 in the DRA reading of connected text. Mark's scores are noteworthy not only in being above the benchmark for his grade level, but also in their consistency across tasks. Midwinter assessments in NWF and a running record indicate that Mark continues to perform at the top of his class, with scores in the 98th and 97th percentiles, respectively. Mark's scores at the end of kindergarten in LNF, LSF, PSF, and NWF, were in the 99th (plus), 98th, 82nd, and 99th (plus) percentiles, respectively. These scores suggest that overall, Mark has been consistently successful in his performance on the literacy-related assessments he has been given.

Mark's Beliefs about the Nature of Reading

Mark believes he is a successful reader and that success is due, in part, to the application of Mrs. P's five strategies for figuring out unknown words. However, when referring to decoding, Mark always mentioned encoding as well. For example, during

our semi-structured interview, I asked Mark to tell me about Saxon Phonics. He said, “Sometimes she says letters and we have to make the sound they do and we have to write the word down and tell what the word is.” I asked Mark how one learns to read. He said, “I would probably tell you you have to sound it out or chunk it.” He explained the difference in these two terms as being small parts of the word as opposed to larger sections of the word. He demonstrated using the word “December” which was printed on a flyer on the table where the interview was conducted.

Mark believes that spelling is most important to his success as a reader. When asked why he considered this helpful, he said that when he learned words in spelling, he also encountered the same words in various texts.

Like Julie, Mark sees decoding strategies as a means to an end—that of encoding the word and reading it correctly. His explanation of phonics instruction concludes with “...and tell what the word is,” suggesting that decoding is simply a tool to get to a meaningful referent. Though my observational notes suggest that Mark did not seem particularly enthusiastic about phonics instruction, he still attended. His frequent references to the need to sounding out words and chunking them suggest that he must attach some importance to these strategies. His ability to play the role of the teacher and show me how to use both types of decoding strategies suggests that these are strategies he has made his own.

Observation and interview data suggests that Mark is aware of the print in his environment and that he sees print as serving several different functions, as illustrated in Table 10 below:

Table 10

Mark's Perceptions of the Functions of Print

Functions	Evidence
As the focus of instruction during literacy learning	Privileging of print over other aspects of instruction (See Ch 3, Table 5); on 10/3/07 I wrote in my field notes during phonics instruction: "M craned his neck to see the easel;" later, I recorded that he whispered, "I can read it!" as a volunteer coded the word. Later that day during whole class reading, M whisper-read the sentence strips along with the volunteer who was called upon to read aloud. On 10/17/07 I again recorded M's craning of the neck to see the flashcards and then the print on the board.
A source of information and authority	On 10/31/07, he paged through text to find the "Author's Note" to respond to an inferential question about the author's writing habits; when Mrs. P asked about what time a story took place, Mark paged through text to find the answer (11/28/07). On both occasions, he read portions of text aloud when called upon to answer.
A source of pleasure, enjoyment, and amusement; a catalyst for meaningful social interactions	Observed enjoyment of books each day of the study during independent reading; "social reading" most noticeable on the days he shared the look-and-find books with friends 10/17/07, 10/31/07, 11/14/07; Mark's expression-rich read-aloud for the class during which he held the book so class could see the pages (10/17/07).
A mediator of activity or interaction between author and reader or between two or more readers	Sign language book (10/3/07); look-and-find books as above; use of puppets 1/2/08.

To Mark, print is a means of preserving ideas and sharing them later with others, as exemplified in his understanding that family members wrote down songs to share with others at a later date. Print also seems to be a source of personal pleasure as indicated in his reading and writing of stories at home. However, he seems to recognize that in the

context of school, print is often used for other, more utilitarian purposes, such as recording what was done during the day, rather than composing a story.

Enactment of Beliefs: Mark's Perceptions of Instruction

Morning routines and shared reading. Mark is an obedient and focused student. As the students enter the classroom in the morning, Mark is usually one of the first to arrive. Each day that I observed him, he came in, went to his locker to put his things away, and went to his desk. His desk was neatly kept both inside and on top; on top, he generally has his seatwork folder and a pencil basket. He got settled quickly and began his morning work, usually a "Daily Fix-It" proofreading exercise. In my field notes I made notes twice about how quickly Mark seems to bring himself back to the task at hand. For example on 10/31/07, I wrote, "Before opening exercises, Mark worked at his desk on his seatwork folder; occasionally he talked and joked with his neighbor but always came back to the task within not more than a few seconds."

As the students are gathered for the shared reading of charts and poems, Mark nearly always looks toward the text. On one occasion, Mrs. P said, "Look at Mark. I'd like to make a poster of him. That's how we're to act."

Seatwork and homework. Mrs. P usually had a project that students were to complete over the course of several days; this often involved copying text from a model, coloring or illustrating each page, and putting the pages together into a booklet. For example, the students made a booklet with the text of the "Five Little Turkeys" poem that they read in the morning, with one page being devoted to each "day" mentioned in the poem. Students copied, colored the turkey pictures, made a cover, and stapled it into a book. Mark's projects of this nature were usually among the first completed. His work was

neatly done and bore a close resemblance to the model, even attempting to make block letters for the cover of his booklet as Mrs. P had done.

Large group reading. As I observed Mark, I noticed that he occasionally whispered with a friend or stared off into space, but he brought himself back to the instructional context quickly. I noticed that during teacher-led activities, he would sometimes drift off for just a few seconds, but two things seemed to prompt him to focus again: 1) the asking of a question, at which Mark's hand would go up immediately, suggesting that although he may have appeared to be inattentive, he was still focused and 2) when Mrs. P began to write on the board or easel. His observation protocol data indicates that during 16 of 17 fifteen-minute observations, he was "sometimes" or "often" focused on the teacher when it was appropriate to do so. He was focused on the text 100% of the time when it was appropriate to do so.

When Mrs. P read books aloud, Mark usually looked attentively toward the book and raised his hand when Mrs. P asked a question about the story. On 10/17/07 I wrote in my field notes:

Mark looks toward the book as Mrs. P reads. Occasionally he looks off into space as the teacher reads, but he appears to be engaged with the story, as his hand shoots up quickly when questions are asked... At the end of the story, *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* (DePaola, 1996), Mark responded spontaneously, 'You mean that's his name?!' (*The name was eight words long.*)

During whole group instruction, Mark does not look particularly enthusiastic until a question is asked. His hand shoots straight up, often before the question is completely voiced by the teacher. On 14 out of 15 fifteen-minute observations during which there were teacher-led questions, Mark answered incorrectly "rarely" or "never."

Twice during my six observations of Mark, I made notes about how he craned his neck to see the print during instruction; in addition, he frequently repositioned himself in order to see the print on a chart or at the board. As students completed phonics worksheets, Mrs. P dictated words for students to spell using their phonics knowledge. After giving students the opportunity to write a word, she asked a volunteer to come to the board and write it correctly. Students were to correct their own work. Mark could be heard softly saying, “Yesss! I got it!” During this time, not all students are engaged with the task and some simply copy the answers as they are written on the board. Mark’s behavior suggests conscientiousness about his written work. More important, perhaps, for the purposes of this study, it suggests that he is not dependent on Mrs. P to complete the task but, rather, engages with print independent of the teacher.

Print, as written on the board by Mrs. P during instruction, captures Mark’s attention. For example, during group work with phonics, Mrs. P usually writes words on the board for students to code. In my field notes on 10/17/07 I recorded, “Mark’s lips move as he watches Mrs. P write. Though she has not asked the students to read, Mark seems drawn to the print. When volunteers are called on to read the words, Mark watches and softly reads along with the volunteer.”

During whole class discussions of stories, Mark consistently raised his hand to participate. When called on, his answers were consistent with the text and I observed him paging back in text to find answers. For example:

Mrs. P: What does the author do that tells us she practices to be a good writer?
Mark (*who had paged back to find a note about the author and was pointing to the text*): It says here that she writes every day.

In this instance, Mark privileged the text over his memory to respond to Mrs. P's question.

Oral reading. Mark's reading is fluent and expressive. During my first observation of Mark, the class was pressed for time during reading class, so Mrs. P asked Mark if he would come to the front and read the basal story aloud for the class. Describing the incident in my field notes I wrote:

He gets his book, stands before the group and begins to read fluently. However, he quickly seems to realize that the students need to see the pictures and tries to position the book so they can see. Juan interjects, "He's the teacher now!" Mark continues to struggle a bit and ends up holding the book toward the class, but having to read the text upside down. He does so with accuracy and fluency.

Mark's struggle with the book suggests that he is not merely interested in decoding the words. He wants his peers to share the story experience with him—both text and illustrations—and he goes out of his way to enable them to do this. On another occasion when I described Mark's oral reading of a reader's theater script, I noted that the fluency and expressiveness of Mark and Julie stood in stark contrast to the other readers in the class whose readings were word by word and devoid of expression. I noted that Mark "appeared confident and smiled slightly as if he enjoyed what he was doing."

Self-selected reading. During independent reading time, Mark elected to read with two friends (the same two boys) whenever given the opportunity to do so. Over the course of three weeks of observations, the boys selected the "Look and Find" books from the classroom library shelves. Describing this activity, I wrote in my field notes on 10/17/07:

Mark and a friend share a Scooby Doo book together. This is a 'Where's Waldo' kind of book with a very detailed illustration on each two-page spread. Spare text on the side of the page directs students to a list of items to find in the picture. The boys spend well over ½ hour with this book and others like it. 'It was in the city book,'

says M to his friend, suggesting that they had done this activity before. They go through the book, stopping to work on selected pages, scanning each for several minutes.

On 11/14/07 I wrote in my field notes:

After completing the worksheet, M went to the bookcase with two friends. They selected their 'usual' look-and-find book. One boy sat with it on his lap. He was flanked by M on one side and the other boy on the other side. M read the directions most frequently, but the other two did so sometimes. M read the directive to find a certain number of objects of a particular type and the boys started counting the objects in a sing-song way as they pointed to each one on the page. M smiles throughout.

It appears from the observations of Mark's behaviors during independent reading time that he prefers books that invite his participation, and he tends to engage the participation of others in a shared reading of the text whenever possible. Mark was using the print as a source of information, indicating what the boys were to find. This suggests that Mark was constructing meaning from the text, using it to accomplish a task, rather than focusing simply on accurate decoding.

Learning to recognize words. During my observation on 10/3/07, I recorded in my field notes that Mark volunteered, "I can read it," following a volunteer's coding work at the easel. While this may seem like an insignificant statement, it suggests that Mark sees purpose in the coding activity beyond the task itself. As further evidence of this, when asked during our interview to explain the Saxon Phonics instruction he had experienced that morning, he said, "Sometimes she says letters and we have to make what sound they do and we have to write the word down and tell what it is." This further demonstrates that he sees that coding is a means to an end, that of reading a word, rather than an end in itself.

During my first observation of Mark, when Mrs. P asked the students to read nonsense words that she had made up using a particular phonics pattern she had just introduced, Mark demonstrated a keen sense of linguistic awareness, not just in being capable of talking about the language, but in focusing on the linguistic over the conceptual:

T: (*having written "flipyam" on the easel*) Ok, can you tell me the word?

Class: flipyam

T: Everybody—say the word.

Class: flipyam

T: What's a flipyam? Mark?

M: a nonsense word

T: Yeah, but let's make up a definition. What's a flipyam? Like what would you say? A flapjack is a pancake, but what's a flipyam?

Not only was Mark able to talk about the word itself, but he was able to put the word into a category, that of nonsense words. This was a task that few of his classmates could do.

Small group reading. When asked to tell about the Guided Reading group in which he had just participated, he immediately focused on the content of the book he had just read, *Dad Has a Headache*. He said, "It's like the book you do, like the book, *Dad Has a Headache*, and the kids try to make it better and it says take a picture and draw it—what the kids did." It is the meaning of the story that is salient to Mark, rather than the skills or strategies. Only when pressed for more information, did Mark talk about the strategies, using Mrs. P's language to further explain what he did in guided reading group that helped him. When Mark answered by listing the five decoding strategies referred to earlier in this paper, I asked how the strategies helped him.

M: Well, you kind of sound it out and like then you put it together and there's the word.

I: How are chunking and sounding out different?

M: Well, chunking is kind of like, let's see, if you use this word (*pointing to a flyer on the table with the word "December"*) you use these letters cause you can put De-cem-ber.

I: Oh, I see. In chunking, you use a big part of the word. What's sounding out?

M: That's like the little pieces of the word.

It's notable that Mark does not simply repeat Mrs. P's words, but he has made her language his own, using it to further his own literacy understandings. In addition, as Mark explained the reading he did at home, he indicated that school literacy language and home literacy language may be similar, or at least he perceives a connection:

I: What do your parents do to help you (when you get stuck on a word at home)?

M: They just tell us to sound it out or chunk it.

Making sense of texts. During my last observation of Mark, he chose a book with a puppet attached. (Mrs. P had several of these in the classroom library.) However, as Mark called to his friends, presumably to engage them as well, the aide made the boys put the puppets away and take a book back to their seats for quiet, individual reading. When Mark was not given the liberty to read books with others, he read quietly at his seat, but on each of two occasions when this was observed, he again chose books that invited participation. First, he selected a sign language alphabet book. The book had photographs of a person signing each letter of the alphabet. Mark rested his left hand on the book's pages and attempted to copy the sign as it was made in the photo. On the second of the two occasions, he chose *Yo, Yes!* (Raschka, 1993). This book contains sparse text—just one and two word exchanges between two characters that are designed to be read expressively. The illustrations contain facial expressions and gestures that suggest the intensity with which the words are spoken. I seated myself just a few feet away from Mark's desk as he read. Though his voice was barely a whisper, I could hear the expressiveness in his voice and he made facial expressions that correlated with the text he was reading, suggesting that he was participating in the story world of the book, rather than decoding words.

When asked to explain various literacy-related tasks, Mark's explanation suggested an assumption that text would make sense. He referred to the sense-making aspect of text as he told me about a homework assignment that required him to choose a word to complete the sentence, he said, "You circle the right one that makes sense."

Summary of Mark's Perceptions about Reading and Learning to Read in Mrs. P's Classroom

Mark comes to Mrs. P's classroom having demonstrated consistent growth as a literacy learner. Although according to Mark's kindergarten teacher he began school socially delayed and is still a quiet boy, he has adapted well. Mark comes from a family that spends time together and demonstrates the value of literacy through modeling and supporting the child's efforts, characteristics identified by Durkin (1966) as common to the family background of early readers. Mark perceives print as sources of both information and pleasure. He is attentive to print at school and has many experiences with different kinds of text, including music and online text, at home. He views reading as a process that is "supposed to make sense." If he doesn't recognize words automatically, he takes them apart, either by phoneme or larger "chunks" of the word and then reconstructs it. Mark perceives the strategies Mrs. P teaches for figuring out unknown words, particularly the breaking down of words, as integral to his success as a reader. Thus, Mark's perceptions of reading and his instruction are consistent with the official script of the classroom. Mark not only enjoys reading both in and out of school, but he sees instruction in recognizing words as a necessary part of successful engagement with text.

Alicia: A Struggler

Situating Alicia

Alicia, a middle-SES Caucasian girl of 6 is petite in comparison to her classmates. “She seems like such a baby,” was a sentiment expressed by Mrs. P and echoed by Mrs. H, the Title I reading teacher. Mrs. P, concerned about Alicia’s struggles in the classroom, said, “I just don’t think she’s developmentally ready. It’s too hard for her.” During each of the six observations of Alicia, I observed that she appeared to become fatigued, sometimes putting her head down on the desk or leaning against the wall to support herself when seated on the floor, yawning, and then sucking her thumb. “She often seems tired,” said the Title I teacher, “but I’m not sure if it’s that she doesn’t get enough sleep or if she just needs a nap.”

As a way of gaining a better understanding of Alicia’s family background, I interviewed Alicia’s kindergarten teacher. Mrs. H described Alicia as “sweet and cooperative.” However, Mrs. H said everything came slowly to Alicia. Alicia entered kindergarten knowing few letters and sounds. She was in the Title I group that had to repeat the first section of lessons due to failure to progress, and although she knew most of her letters and sounds by the end of the year, she continued to have difficulty with sight words. Mrs. H also said that Alicia’s background of experience seemed limited. The kindergarten teacher reported that Alicia seemed to have adequate social skills and did not exhibit the thumb-sucking or fatigue that I had observed in first grade.

Mrs. H reported that Alicia’s parents seemed young. She did not know if the parents attended college, but given their age, she thought they probably had not. Mrs. H said the parents were very concerned about Alicia’s difficulties. “They really seem to want to help,” said Mrs. H, “but how much is actually done at home, I don’t know.” (These

sentiments were echoed by the Title I teacher who described Alicia's mother as "young but well-intentioned.") Though the parents and Mrs. H wanted Alicia retained in kindergarten, the district's no-retention policy did not permit this, and Alicia was promoted to first grade.

Like Julie and Mark, Alicia was asked to bring artifacts from home as a way of better understanding her family background. Alicia spoke softly, pulling out one item at a time. When asked to describe each of her items, Alicia did so by telling brief stories about each. First, she brought out a photo of a boy that looked to be about 18 months old.

A: "He's my baby brother and we have to take care of our baby brothers...One time he went into the kitchen and I had to get him.

I: We have to take care of our brothers and sisters, don't we?

A: Yeah, my mom said, "No, he can't be in here," and I had to get him.

Alicia's second item was a small plush puppy:

I: Tell me about what you brought here.

A: Um, a puppy. I went to this hair place and my mom said if I let them do my hair I could get something and if I let them I could get one of these.

Her third special item was a DVD entitled, "The Naked Brothers Band:"

I: What else is in your bag, Alicia?

A: A band.

I: Tell me about it.

A: (*pointing to the words on the case*) It's called The Naked Brothers Band. It's really good and it's the one that just came out. My mom got it at the store. It was the last one and it was at Target...(*pointing to the title*) I can read this.

I: You can?

A: (*pointing to the title and saying each word in a slow and detached way*) Nickolodean Naked Brothers Band. It's about like I like this part (*pointing to a photo of the singers on the back*). That's ____ and _____. They sing together and they're in love. They love each other and they're gonna get married.

When asked if anyone else at her home read, her responses suggest that schoolwork influences her perceptions of literacy at home. She said her brother "is trying to practice cuz he's only three years old." She said her mom and dad also read: "My mom reads Polar the Bear and my dad reads the Indian book. And then my mom and I read about the

dog and the pumpkin.” Whether or not family members read at home for purposes other than reading to or with Alicia, this is the literacy practice of others in the home that is most salient to her. It seems that reading and writing at home is done largely for school purposes, such as homework completion, and is sometimes a source of conflict between Alicia and her mother. During the Title I reading class I observed on 10/10/07, I recorded in my field notes, “Alicia put her head down as the teacher pointed to the letter “m” on the page for which they were to say the sound. ‘I didn’t get enough sleep,’ she said, ‘because I had to do my homework.’” Though this comment may easily have been passed off as an excuse for not feeling like doing her school work, Mrs. P showed me two homework papers that had been turned in, which suggested that homework is, indeed, a source of frustration for Alicia. One was a math worksheet with the answers that should have been written in numbers of about three-quarters of an inch at most, given the size of the paper, but which had been scrawled sloppily with numbers of about two inches. (This was not characteristic of Alicia’s in-class work and other homework.) “Is that frustration, or what?” asked Mrs. P. The second paper was turned in uncompleted. The task was to complete sentences using words from a word bank. Mrs. P reported that the parent had called her at home the night before and said that she had spent 2 ½ hours on the paper with Alicia, but Alicia could not do it. The mother said Alicia could say the sounds of the three-letter words on the page, but she could not put them together. Such frustrations were echoed in one of my interviews with Alicia about another homework paper:

I: Alicia can you tell me about this paper? Did anything here give you trouble?

A (*pointing*): That one and that one and that one.

I: Why did they give you trouble?

A: The words.

I: What gave you trouble about the words?

A: That every time when I sound em out and I get em wrong my mom got mad...

I: How do you decide what gets circled here?

A: Um, I show my mom and when she goes no and then when I go to another one and she says yes...And my mom helps me with spelling but I don't like it.

I: What don't you like about it?

A: She tells me to spell it. Not on the paper, I mean. I have to say it.

In an informal interview with Alicia about her family and home experiences, she said she likes to go to the park, play games with her little brother, watch cartoons, and have sleepovers with her friends. She said her family likes to “go somewhere together,” usually to Chuck E. Cheese’s, a pizza restaurant with child-oriented games and activities. She also said they recently traveled to Florida, where they went to a zoo and an aquarium. She said her parents read to her at night, usually *Sponge Bob*, which is her favorite story. Alicia said her mother works at the day care where she attends, and that her father works at “Morris-Black, where they make stuff.”

Data from Alicia’s cumulative file indicates that she attended a local day care center “from birth,” attended full-day kindergarten, and entered first grade at the age of six years, having turned six the day before school began.

On assessments of LNF and LSF administered in September, Alicia scored 28 and 11, respectively. Since these scores were below the benchmark for the beginning of first grade, Alicia was given the Scott Foresman placement test that accompanied the basal series. On this assessment, she scored 72%, which is below the 80% recommended score for the basal-related intervention program. Scott Foresman recommends that students scoring below 80% receive the *Early Reading Intervention (ERI)* program, also published by Scott Foresman. This program focuses on letter naming, letter sounds, segmenting, and blending. However, Alicia had had this program during kindergarten, so the Title I coordinator made a decision to have students scoring below 80% do the

Reading Mastery program, a scripted, skills-based curriculum. On the Scott Foresman placement test, Alicia scored 5/5 for phonemic awareness of initial sounds, 3/5 for phonemic awareness of final sounds, 3/5 for blending sounds, and 19/30 for segmenting sounds within words. She segmented only the first sound of a word rather than each individual sound. When given the untimed letter-sound test, Alicia scored 45/52. She scored 2/10 on sight word recognition. These scores suggest that Alicia knows most letter sounds, but has difficulty with blending and segmenting sounds. In addition, she has little sight word knowledge. These scores suggest areas of relative strength and weakness that are somewhat consistent with her scores at the end of kindergarten. On the Aimsweb tests on LNF, LSF, PSF, and NWF, which were administered at the end of kindergarten, Alicia scored in the 1st, 6th, 22nd, and 4th percentiles, respectively. The improved performance in letter sound knowledge on the placement test was probably due to the untimed testing situation. The scores in PSF and NWF are consistent with her difficulties in blending and segmenting sounds within words. According to the pre-established Aimsweb designations, Alicia was “Strategic”, meaning that she needed targeted intervention in addition to the regular curriculum. However, it should be noted that although Alicia’s scores were low, she was not given the lowest designation of “Intensive” at the end of kindergarten, meaning in need of substantial intervention. Her designation did change to “Intensive” with the most recent mid-winter testing at the end of January in first grade. Testing included NWF and a running record; Alicia scored in the 38th and 2nd percentiles, respectively. The tests administered suggest that students at the mid-winter point of first grade are expected to utilize the subskills of letter sound knowledge, phonemic awareness, and blending, to begin to read connected text. It

appears that while Alicia experienced some difficulty at the kindergarten level, the intensive interventions put in place to correct the deficiencies were not effective; performance in the subskills did not improve substantially nor was she successful in her ability to read connected text.

In spite of Alicia's difficulties, it does seem, however, that Alicia has made progress in some areas throughout the semester. At the end of October, about four weeks into the study, I recorded in my field notes that Mrs. H (the Title I teacher) said she is more concerned about Alicia than most of her other first grade students. She said, "I asked Alicia to use 'sat' in a sentence but she couldn't. She started to tell a story instead." In January, when I did my last observation of Alicia's Title I reading class, the following was recorded:

A: (*reading from the Reading Mastery text that her teacher held up*) f-a-n, fan. The fan is blowing in my face.

T: Good, Alicia. Try the next one.

A: c-a-n, can

T: Yes.

A: This is not the right can. Or how about, 'Mom opened the can.'

Alicia was not directed to make sentences after reading the word. She did so

spontaneously. After my observation of the class, Mrs. H said, "Did you notice how

Alicia used the words in sentences? She couldn't do that at the beginning of the year."

Alicia's perception of herself as a reader was somewhat inconsistent. The following exchange took place after a guided reading group on 10/10/07. I asked Alicia about a written response after reading a story about animals. She had written, "The tail is on the dog." She read this to me, word by word, pointing to each.

I: How did you know that was "dog?"

A: Because my aunt and uncle have a dog and I know how to spell. And I know how to read. (*She seemed to add the latter as an afterthought.*)

However, during our semi-formal interview on 10/31/07, the following exchange took place:

I: Are you a good reader?

A: Not that good.

Perhaps in the second case, the previous interview questions influenced her response. We had just discussed what it meant to be a good reader and I had asked her to identify someone in her class who was good at reading. Alicia identified her friend Andrea, who, according to Alicia, “sounds really good, like she knows how to read already.” Alicia repeated this idea of sounding like “you know how to read already” in a second interview, suggesting that this is a salient perception of what it means to be successful. Perhaps Alicia’s perception of herself as a reader was being altered as she gained a better sense of her skills in relation to others in her class. In the previous case, Alicia may have been referring to herself as “good” based on the pretend reading that young children sometimes engage in as they narrate text they have encountered before (Pappas, 1993). As Alicia read the sentence she had composed, she did so without decoding (decoding skills were minimal at that point in the year and she did not segment the sounds of any of the words) but in a way that imitated the word by word style she had been exposed to in Mrs. P’s classroom. A few weeks later she may have come to the realization that her skills were inadequate in relation to others in the class.

Alicia’s Beliefs about the Nature of Reading

Success in reading. Alicia believes that success in reading is due to “knowing how already.” This seems to be tied to her belief that good reading is being able to point to the word and “say it.” This is consistent with her belief in the value of re-reading:

A: ...She calls us up to read this book and we have to read it over and over and when we read it and when we grow up we'll know how to read.

I: You said sometimes you read over and over. Why do you think you do that in your reading group?

A: So we can learn to read.

I: How does it help you?

A: Because if you read it over and over you'll know how to read.

I: If I didn't know how to read and you were my teacher, what would you tell me to do?

A: I'd tell you to read a book.

I: But what if I don't know how?

A: ...I'd show you how...I'd tell you to point your finger at the word and if you get it wrong you have to do it all over again.

Later in the interview I asked Alicia what helps her most to be a good reader. "To do it over and over again," she said. I probed a bit further, asking the same question in a slightly different way:

I: What does Mrs. P do that helps you the most to be a good reader?

A: Well, the best thing is when we're sitting on the floor she writes down words and she says them to us and then we say the word and that's how we get to know it.

I: Is there anything about learning to read that doesn't help you very much?

A: Well, if you only do it one time it doesn't help you.

This view that reading is based on hearing text orally and remembering is further supported by her explanation of reading a hard book at home with her mother. She said, "I can't understand it so I get to understand 'cause first my mom reads it to me and then I read it."

Though listening and remembering seems to be Alicia's understanding of reading, she diligently attempts to utilize the "sounding out" strategies she has been taught. However, these attempts have resulted in frustration, perhaps because she does not seem to understand that "sounding out" is a means to the end of encoding a word, rather than an end in itself. This is illustrated in her attempts to read to me. On 12/19/07 she brought me *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, and attempted to read each word sound by sound.

Consistent with her mother's conversation with Mrs. P in which the mother reported that Alicia would say the sounds of words but would not put them together, Alicia just looked up frequently as she said the sounds of the words, a look of complete puzzlement on her face. She seems to be missing the idea that sounds need to be blended back together to make a meaningful connection with a concept.

For Alicia, decoding seems to be an end in itself. For example, during our semi-structured interview, Alicia told me that to learn to read you need to sound things out. She demonstrated by segmenting the sounds in the word "tot" which was on a paper on the table at which we were working. However, she did not put the sounds together, and perhaps would not have recognized the word as a meaningful referent even if she had. Perhaps Alicia's decoding efforts have been complicated by a curriculum that sometimes requires students to decode words for which they have no meaningful referent, e.g., "meek," "nab," and nonsense words. Alicia's disinterest in phonics instruction, as implied by her lack of attention to the print during whole class instruction, suggests that she has not found it useful. According to the Title I teacher, Alicia "reads" nonsense words by imposing a real word on the nonsense sounds. For example, she misread "lom" as "lock;" her second attempt was "lokm." This suggests that despite instructional tasks in decoding that do not always focus on meaningful associations between print and meaningful referent, Alicia clings to a belief that print is supposed to make sense or at least connect to something she has heard before.

Observation and interview data suggests that Alicia sees print as serving several different functions, as illustrated in Table 11 below:

Table 11

Alicia's Perceptions of the Functions of Print

Functions	Evidence
A model for “correct” writing and as a source of correct answers in school; something to be copied	During an informal interview 10/31/07, Alicia pointed to the model which had been done by Mrs. P as the source for her own completion of a worksheet on which she had to write sentences; when asked about her writing sample during formal interview, she replied, “Cause I don’t have my list of what to write...that’s all I can remember.” (<i>Formal interview</i>)
Something to be committed to memory	Reliance on oral reading of text as the key to successful “reading”: “(Mrs. P) writes down words and she says them to us and we say the word and that’s how we get to know how to read.” (<i>Formal interview</i>)
Secondary to or equal with people as a means of authority	Explaining a worksheet, “You have to read and you have to do what the teacher tells us.”(12/5/07) Explanation of Pocket Chart learning center: “Mrs. P said...” although the print directives were right in front of her

	(12/19/07).
“White noise” in a literate environment	Charts and flash cards that are not attended to during shared reading (See Ch. 3, Table 5)
Something that should make sense but doesn't	Reading letters from the <i>Reading Mastery</i> page, “Is af an animal?”; reading “lock” for the nonsense word, “lom” (12/19/07)
A source of learning and new knowledge	When asked why she chose a particular book: “I want to learn about...”

When asked about writing at home and at school, Alicia said they were the same. She explained that she wrote a story. I asked her to show me the kinds of things she writes at home: She wrote, “I see a cat.” (See Figure 3.)

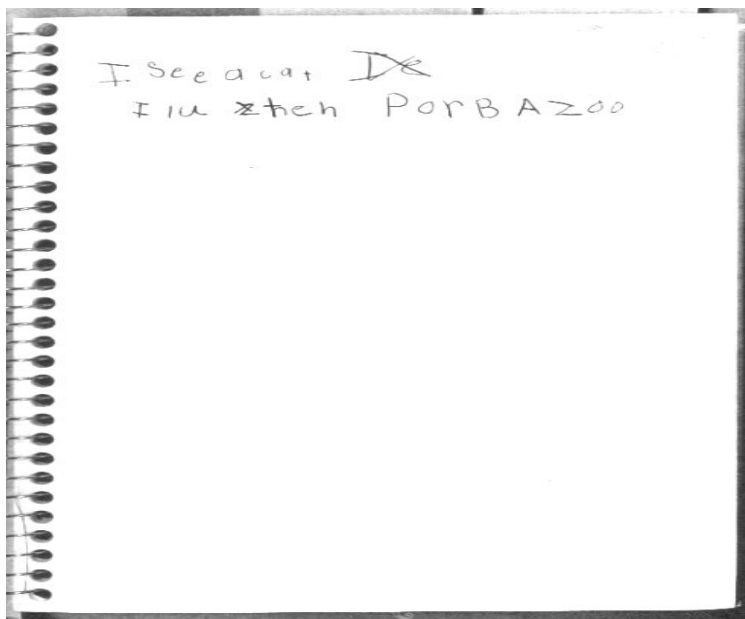


Figure 3. Alicia's Writing Sample.

Alicia followed her writing by saying, “Everybody can read this.”

“What does it say?” I asked.

Reading word-by-word, Alicia read, “I see a cat.”

“Why did you decide to write that?” I asked.

“Because I don’t have my list of what to write...and that’s all I can remember,” she explained.

In a sense, Alicia’s perception matches reality—she does write the same things at home as she does at school. In school, she has learned that good writing is copying from the board. She seems to have transferred this to the home environment, believing that in order for others to be able to read what she has written, she needs to copy the text from another source. To Alicia, writing at home and school are the same, perhaps because she writes the same things in both places, i.e., things she has copied from other sources. Alicia seems to have an underlying but persistent view that print should mean something. During our interview, I tried to change the topic after it appeared that she had finished her writing sample. (She had completed “I see a cat.”) I asked her about a paper that was giving her trouble in the classroom:

I: You were working on a paper when we left the classroom. Was anything giving you trouble with that?

A: (*Thinking aloud as she wrote*), I like polar bears. I know how to spell zoo. I don’t know how to spell polar bear.

I: Just do the best you can.

When I asked her about the worksheet in the classroom, she responded, “No. The polar bear is at the zoo.” Apparently, she was deflecting my question about the paper and focusing on how to complete her thoughts effectively in writing. She continued to write. Though her writing lacks letter-sound correspondence, she works hard to get her thought

on paper and is able to use some letter-sound knowledge, as well as “t-e-h” for the word “the.”

Enactment of Beliefs: Alicia’s Perceptions of Instruction

Morning routines and shared reading. As students enter the classroom in the morning, Alicia moves slowly to put her things away. Students have been given worksheets in their folder for “morning work,” which they are to begin as soon as they get settled. On the first days I observed Alicia, she looked briefly at the worksheets, usually one math sheet and two worksheets that required sorting of pictures with related phonics sounds that had to be colored, cut, and pasted. She would spend about a minute looking at the worksheet and arranging crayons, scissors, and water bottle on her desk, and then she would take the paper to Mrs. P to ask about the task. Mrs. P coached Alicia in reading the directions for the worksheet, which were often written rebus-style. I described a typical exchange in my field notes on 10/24/07:

Mrs. P slowly gives Alicia the sounds of each word in the directions and Alicia blends the sounds together. She seems to be following the line of print as she supplies the rebus word at the appropriate time. She could recognize none of the words at sight and could supply no sounds of her own.

As the class engaged in the shared reading of charts and poems, Alicia sometimes participated with exaggerated mouthing of the words. Her “reading” was generally just a bit behind most of her classmates. Observation protocols of Alicia’s behaviors during opening exercises and shared reading indicate that Alicia was “often” or “sometimes” focused on things in the environment that were not text-related.

Seatwork. A few weeks into the study, I had become a somewhat familiar part of the classroom. Alicia began coming to me immediately in the morning for help with her seatwork. She tended to greet me with, “What do you do here?” When I tried to respond

by turning the question back to her, she shrugged. The following exchange was typical for Alicia:

A: What do you do here?

I: What do you think you have to do on this paper?

A: I think you have to do some rhyming words.

I: You have to see if they rhyme? How do you find out if they rhyme?

A: I don't really know.

I: So what are you going to do first?

A: Cutting and gluing.

Alicia seemed to have little concept of the routine nature of tasks, like matching and sorting activities commonly found on the phonics worksheets the class was given. When she could not figure out what to do, she began the day by coloring the pictures and, if there were dotted lines indicating a cutting and pasting activity, she cut out all of the pieces and left them on her desk for later.

Large group reading. Data from the observation protocols indicate that of 16 fifteen-minute observations, Alicia looked toward the teacher “often” or “sometimes” about 80% of the time when it was appropriate to do so. She looked toward the text 44% of the time when it was appropriate to do so. This suggests that in general, a person, in this case the teacher, is a more salient focal point than print for Alicia. What is more important to note, however, is that the observation protocols include data from a variety of classroom situations. With few exceptions, the times when Alicia was “often” or “sometimes” focused on text were small group reading (either Title I or Guided Reading with Mrs. P), a manipulative activity (such as word building with tiles), or a writing activity. Alicia rarely attended to print in whole group settings like shared reading or phonics. In these situations, she focused predominantly on the teacher or on something in the room other than the focus of instruction.

As the children gather on the rug at the easel area for read-alouds each morning, Alicia is attentive to the story; however, periodically Mrs. P stops to ask questions, often calling attention to some aspect of language used in the book or making a connection to a skill students have learned in their literacy instruction. For example, reading a book about apples, Mrs. P began to discuss the meaning of the word “crisp” which had appeared on the page. Though Alicia had been attentive to the non-fiction text until that point, she immediately turned her head away, began playing with a bit of fuzz on the floor, and remained disengaged until the reading resumed.

Alicia’s participation in large group literacy activities was minimal. She rarely volunteered to answer questions. The observation protocol data indicates that she raised her hand “often” or “sometimes” during a period in only two of 14 fifteen-minute observation periods. In my field notes I made note of a deviance from Alicia’s pattern of non-participation. A Guidance teacher comes in once during every 6-day cycle to do a lesson on some type of social skill. Though not specifically literacy-related, the class included many oral language opportunities for the students, as the teacher asked questions and each student was given the opportunity to respond. The environment was non-threatening, as the teacher emphasized that all answers were acceptable: “This is based on what you think, so you can’t be right or wrong,” she told the children. The teacher also set strict ground rules about respecting everyone’s right to speak. She used a Native American “talking stick,” a bamboo tube of about three feet in length and two inches in diameter with beads inside that made a pleasant “whooshing” sound as students passed it to the one whose turn it was to speak. The rule was that unless you had the stick, you could not talk. The teacher asked students to tell about various aspects of

friendship, for example, telling things they liked to do together or what qualities made a good friend. Alicia seemed very motivated to participate in this discussion. She watched the stick as it was passed and raised her hand each time a question was asked. When called upon to tell what she liked to do with her friend, she started to respond by saying, “We like to go--,” but she started again, the second time repeating what the person before her had said. Given the ground rules, this was acceptable. This participatory behavior, uncharacteristic of Alicia during literacy instruction as it takes place in Mrs P’s classroom, may be due to any of several factors. First, Alicia may have been motivated by the novelty of and/or the kinesthetic nature of the talking stick. Second, she may have been motivated by the discussion format, as opposed to inquiry-response-feedback pattern evident in most of the literacy instruction in Mrs. P’s classroom. The questions were focused enough that none of the children engaged in the rambling storytelling that often characterizes the sharing times of primary-level children, but the students were encouraged to share their own experiences. A third possibility is that Alicia was motivated to respond because she felt less threatened during this discussion than during regular literacy instruction. However, this seems improbable given that Alicia changed her response to match that of a previous student. It seems that she was still concerned about the “rightness” of her answer, but she had a strong desire to participate in the discussion.

Oral reading. Given the intensive decoding work Alicia experiences in her instruction, it is not difficult to understand Alicia’s tendency to attempt to decode everything she encounters in print. Alicia’s reading of a journal entry the class had just written during shared writing is characteristic of her oral reading:

A: The, the. We wrote something about Adam.

I: You did write something about Adam's birthday, didn't you? Can you find the part that talks about Adam? (*She looks at the page but can't locate it. I point to the name.*) What else did you write about today in your journal?

A: The—Is that a b or a d?

I: That's a b.

A: /b/ /a/ /b/ /yuh/ (*Repeats the sounds again and looks up at me, puzzled.*)

I: Baby.

A: baby came /t/ /o/ /d/ /a/ /yuh/ (*Again, looks up at me puzzled.*)

With the exception of a few sight words, like “came,” Alicia “read” by saying each sound individually.

Self-selected reading. Alicia's tendency to “read” by saying the sounds within each word was also observed during self-selected reading. Alicia tended to read by herself for only about four or five minutes. She seemed to be trying to say the sounds of the words softly. Then she would bring me a book from the rack, such as *The Twelve Days of*

Christmas:

I: Tell me about the book you picked.

A: The (*attempts to sound out “twelve”, letter by letter.*)

I: twelve

A: The Twelve Days /o/ /f/

I: of

A: (*attempting to sound out the sounds in “Christmas”*) /k/ /h/ /t/.

Knowing that I was probably enabling her dependence on me but unable to think of an appropriate question that would contribute something of value to the study, I supplied words. Alicia turned to the dedication page and continued trying to sound out each word, letter by letter. I asked her where the story started. She said, “Right here,” and pointed to the dedication page she had just read. She did not seem to have the concepts of print to understand the front matter of the book, or, perhaps, what she knows about books was overshadowed by her belief in the importance of saying letter-sounds.

Learning to recognize words. Following Title I class, it is usually time for a Special. When students return, they have Saxon Phonics. During phonics instruction, as the students gather on the floor in front of the easel area, Alicia becomes increasingly unfocused as the 30 to 40 minute lesson progresses. Initially, as the teacher asks review questions, Alicia looks toward her; however, as the teacher then begins to flip flash cards, Alicia only attends intermittently to the cards, though she does mouth the sounds of words, slightly behind the group. As the teacher begins to explain the new phonics rule, Alicia attends less. Describing this in my field notes on 12/5/07, I wrote:

Only occasionally does Alicia look in the direction of the teacher or the print on the board, though she mouths the sounds she is supposed to be making with the group...When students are told to look at a pocket chart on the opposite side of the room and read the sight word cards in the pockets together, Alicia nods her head in the rhythm of the reading, but does not read the words that have been posted: color, to, do, your, who, into, said, you, of, the.

This behavior, characteristic of Alicia during the six times she was a focal student, suggests that although Alicia cannot participate in the expected ways, she is trying to take part in the instructional activity. After the group phonics instruction, during which phonics concepts are reviewed and new concepts are introduced through modeling, students are given the opportunity for guided practice, as they are invited to the easel to code words according to the new rules. During six observations of Alicia, she was never observed to volunteer or participate in this part of the lesson. As students were called to the board, she tended to look around the room or toward the floor. Occasionally, she “sang” silently, whispered to the person next to her, or played with her fingers. Following the group work, students return to their seats to complete the worksheet portion of the lesson. Mrs. P dictates words that students are to write on their paper, applying the phonics rules just learned. Alicia tended to dawdle in her writing of the

word, writing just the first sound, and then she copied the word as it was written by a volunteer on the board. On the second part of the worksheet, students are to code words that are printed on the page. As I watched Alicia, she appeared to do this on her own and did so correctly. Since papers were collected immediately following the activity, I did not have a chance to ask Alicia to read the words she had written or coded, but observing her performance during guided reading when she was asked to highlight words of a particular word family on each page, I noted that Alicia found the words quickly and accurately. However, when asked to read the page, she had difficulty reading the words. This suggests that she responds to visual cues within the words as a means of determining how to complete the activities involving marking of the words.

On the sixth day of each cycle, students are assessed in most subjects. Though I could not observe Alicia's Title I assessment that was comprised of a list of nonsense words she had to decode, Mrs. H reported on Alicia's performance:

Alicia tries to make words as she reads the nonsense words. She cannot seem to do just the sounds once she has a word in her mind. She also has difficulty holding sounds and linking them together and when I tell her to look at the letters she just adds sounds to the word she has in her head.

Similar behavior occurred when I observed Mrs. P working with Alicia during a Guided Reading group. Using my field jottings and a transcript of the observation, I described the experience in my field notes on 10/24/07 as follows:

Alicia and another boy are working on a worksheet that has a list of words to read in the -ock family. They have done "rock" and "dock" when I arrive. Mrs. P explains what a dock is after the word is read. The next word is "tock" and Mrs. P prompts Alicia to put a t in front of -ock.

"Tire," responds Alicia.

"No," says Mrs. P, "Put the t in front of -ock. t-o-k

"Tock," repeats Alicia.

The next word was "clock."

"What goes "tock?" asks Mrs. P.

“Top,” replies Alicia until Mrs. P supplies the sounds in the word which Alicia successfully blends together. The next set of words is the –op family.

“What’s this word?” asks Mrs. P.

“Tock,” says Alicia.

“No, there’s a ‘p’ at the end,” prompts Mrs. P. “T-o-p”

“Top” repeats Alicia.

When asked to generate rhyming words for “top” and “pop”

“/m/,” says Mrs. P, trying to prompt Alicia to say “mop”.

“Mom,” says Alicia.

“No, op,” corrects Mrs. P

“Dad,” says Alicia, at which point Mrs. P resorted to simply supplying the sounds of the word for Alicia to blend together.

Although first grade reading instruction should include both content and linguistic cues (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), this exchange suggests that both together may be a source of confusion for Alicia. Perhaps meaning cues derived from oral language are more salient for her than linguistic cues, causing confusion in a curriculum where the phonological cueing system is privileged over other cueing systems.

Small group reading. Alicia is usually taken for Title I reading class right after the read-aloud time. Changes in Alicia’s performance and participation from the beginning of the study to the end occurred most notably in the context of the Title I class. Alicia and one other student met with the Title I teacher for *Reading Mastery* lessons. Prior to beginning the lesson, Mrs. H always allowed the children some time to exercise as they followed some specific directions. Next, she allowed each of the students to “share a story.” Though this part of the tape was inaudible, Alicia shared a story about something she had done when playing outside the previous afternoon. As the lesson began, Mrs. H explained the instructions for the first task: crossing out letters on the page as she dictates the letter name. Alicia interrupted, “I found a pearl--”

“We’re finished with sharing time,” replied the teacher, cutting off her story and redirecting her to the crossing out task. In a fast-paced lesson, which moves from

identifying three review letter names and sounds on the page and then the introduction of a new letter, much use is made of repetition, with the teacher modeling sounds and children repeating. The goal appears to be automatic responses on the part of students when they see a particular letter. Next, students are asked to segment and blend two- and three- phoneme words. The teacher, following the script as it is written, says to Alicia and the other student:

Touch the first ball of the arrow for “see.” (*The word “see” is printed in large letters on the page. Both of the “e’s” are marked with macrons and a lighter gray line is under the word. The line begins with a small ball on the left, which students are supposed to put their finger on and move to the right as they say the sounds, blending them together.*) Sound it out. Get ready. Move quickly under each sound. Ssssee. Return to the first ball. Again, sound it out. Get ready. Move quickly under each sound. Sssee. (Repeat until firm.) Return to the first ball. Say it fast. See. Yes, what word? See. (from *Reading Mastery, page 309*)

Students sound out six more words in this fashion, including “rock,” which is written with a “k” only about $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of the other letters in the word. Silent letters are written in this way to cue students that the letter is silent. This must have been made explicit to the students, because during one observation, Mrs. H asked Alicia why the letter was smaller. The tone of the question was quiz-like, suggesting that they had been over this before. Alicia answered, “Because it’s silent.” Another word included in this decoding activity was “the.” The “th” was written so that the two letters touched at the base; the “e” was marked with a macron. The decoding of this word, typically taught as a sight word, was the same process as that of the other words which were clearly decodable: fan, me, an, and rat. Though Alicia had some difficulty initially holding the first sound of each word until Mrs. H told her to go on, Alicia performed the tasks successfully.

Alicia’s Reading Mastery Lesson

Following the blending of sounds into words in the *Reading Mastery* lesson, students were shown three rhyming words with the line underneath: an, can, fan. Students were given the following instructions:

- a. Point to an and can. These words rhyme.
- b. Touch the first ball of the arrow for an. Sound it out. Get ready. Aaann.
- c. Return to the first ball. Again, sound it out. Get ready. Move quickly under the word. Aaaannn.
- d. Return to the first ball. Say it fast. An. Yes, an.
- e. Touch the first ball of the arrow for can. This rhymes with (pause). Say it fast and rhyme with (pause) an. Get ready. Can. Yes, can.
- f. Return to the first ball for can. This rhymes with (pause) an. Get ready. Can. Yes, can.
- g. Repeat f until firm.
- h. Call on different children to do fan.

The “an” part of each of the words are written in green; Mrs. H told me that this is used in the curriculum to signal rhyming words. The last part of the lesson is labeled “Story” in the teacher’s manual. The students are given a worksheet but are not to look at the picture until the sentence “That fan ran,” has been decoded. Students are directed to point to the sentence at the top of the worksheet. “This is a story. You’re going to read the story. Then you’ll see a picture for this story,” directs Mrs. H, reading from the script. Step-by-step directions for decoding each word of the sentence, sound by sound, are given until the sentence has been read in its entirety. Each word is sounded out several times, using clapping and pointing to the line beneath the words. “Everybody, finger on the first ball. Sound it out. Get ready. Again, finger on the first ball. Sound it out. Get ready,” says the teacher, according to the script. Alicia follows the instructions as given by the teacher. Finally, students are told, “In the picture you’re going to see, ‘That fan ran.’” The script says, “Repeat (step) a until firm.” Next, the teacher is to say, “Turn your take-home over and look at the picture. (Ask these questions.) Where’s that fan? Yes, on the

table. Why are those papers blowing around? What do you do with a fan? Did a fan ever blow your papers away? The sentence is on the opposite side of the paper from the picture.

Students are expected to complete the two-sided page for homework. The worksheets were always similar in the tasks: 1) Copy a given sentence twice on the handwriting lines. 2) The student was given two examples: one a box divided into two sections, one with a picture of a fish and the second section with the letter m, and a second box divided into two sections, one with an airplane and the letter “e” with a macron. Beneath the two examples were twelve divided boxes, each with either a fish or an airplane. The student was to write the letter in the box, as shown in the model. (Puzzled by the lack of correspondence between the pictures and the letter, I asked the teacher the purpose of this activity. She said it was to develop left-to right progression; the picture comes first, and students are to write the letter to the right of the picture.) 3) Cross out all the “r’s” in a random display of about a dozen letters and circle all of the “e’s”. 4) Given two columns of letters, one including the connected form of the “th” referred to above, match the letters. 5) Practice writing a row of each of six letters. After Mrs. P received the phone call concerning Alicia’s difficulties with the homework, Mrs. P and Mrs. H agreed that the *Reading Mastery* take-home activity would be Alicia’s only homework. She appeared to have no difficulty completing the assigned tasks, and, according to the Title I teacher, the homework was consistently turned in the following day, as expected.

Making sense of texts. It seems that Alicia is persistent about trying to find meaning in the reading she does—even in *Reading Mastery text*. On one of my last observations in January, I was invited to visit Alicia’s Title I class, which I did even though Alicia was

not the focal student that day. I recorded the following exchange that took place in the Title I classroom. Students were shown a page in the teacher's manual that had about a dozen randomly placed letters on the page. Two of the letters, placed in proximity to one another, were "a" and "f."

A: Is af an animal?

T: Do you mean like Africa?

A: No, I was saying is something called an af?

T: Well, there's no animal, but maybe you are thinking of Africa. A lot of animals come from Africa.

A: (*shaking her head*) No, I was wondering if there was an animal called that. Alicia, not a headstrong student, appeared to be genuinely reflective during this

exchange. In spite of a curriculum that encourages automatic responses, Alicia's behavior suggests the persistence of her expectation that the instruction, i.e., the print that is the basis for the instruction, should be meaningful.

Summary of Alicia's Perceptions about Reading and Learning to Read in Mrs. P's

Classroom

Alicia is the youngest student in Mrs. P's first grade classroom, having turned six just prior to the first day of school. She is described by all who work with her as cooperative but "babyish," particularly in her tendency to become fatigued. Alicia's parents exhibit concern for Alicia and a desire to help her succeed, but reading and writing for school-based purposes, such as completing homework, is the home literacy practice most salient to Alicia. Out-of-school, Alicia prefers activities such as watching TV or going to the park. Alicia sees reading as the ability to reproduce what has been read to her by someone else. She has an emerging sense that when this is not possible, saying the sounds within words is an acceptable alternative. She has an underlying view that print is supposed to be meaningful but views decoding as an end in itself. Though

focusing on one cueing system to the exclusion of others is not unusual for a beginning reader at the “experimenter” stage (McGee & Richgels, 2000), Alicia lacks an important characteristic of this stage—attendance to the print in her environment (McGee & Richgels, 2000). Hearing text read by an adult, whether a single word or whole text, is viewed by Alicia as the most helpful aspect of reading instruction. To Alicia, the salient part of the official script of the classroom is the importance of decoding and fluent reading. She appears to have difficulty reconciling this with her own notion that print is supposed to *mean*.

Juan: A Struggler

Situating Juan

Juan, a low-SES Hispanic boy of six, does not seem particularly shy, but is not a very talkative child. On a home language survey completed when Juan entered kindergarten, Juan’s mother indicated that English is Juan’s first language and the primary language spoken in the home. When I asked Juan if he ever spoke Spanish, he said no. Juan may also lack the background of experience that some of his peers have, as suggested by this exchange in the Title I class:

Teacher: When would you use a map?

Student: When you’re lost or when you go to Florida.

Teacher: Juan, have you ever used a map?

Juan: I’ve never been to Florida because my dad doesn’t have the money.

Juan’s response is characteristic of some students in Slatington; they rarely venture outside of the area. (Traveling even to Allentown, Pennsylvania, a city eighteen miles away, is considered a major trip that is infrequently taken.)

In an effort to better understand Juan’s family and home experiences, I interviewed his kindergarten teacher. Mrs. G said Juan lives with his mother, father, older sister, baby

brother, and grandfather. Mrs. G reported that Juan entered kindergarten with many challenges and made minimal progress. She said he had poorly developed social skills, often resorting to pushing, hitting, and nastiness toward other students.

Mrs. G said Juan's parents "have minimal education" and that they did not work while he attended kindergarten. Mrs. G reported that one of Juan's biggest problems was a lack of motivation. He told Mrs. G, "My mom and dad don't have to work, so I don't have to work either." Mrs. G said Juan got no academic support at home. She said booklets and papers came back signed, but that it was obvious no one had gone over the letters, sounds, or words with him.

Mrs. G said Juan entered kindergarten knowing his colors, but he knew no letters or sounds nor could he write his name. With the support of an intensive daily Title I intervention program, he learned most letters and sounds, but his literacy learning progress was otherwise minimal. Mrs. G said the only way Juan could "read" was with the support of text with rebus pictures over the words.

When I informally interviewed Juan about his family and home experiences, he said his father "customizes cars" and "lays streets—you know, puts the stuff on the streets." He said his mother works at the high school, but he did not know what she did there. I asked Juan what kinds of things he did with his family. He said, "Watch TV." I asked if they ever went places together. He said, "We go to birthday parties. We go to eat." He said no one ever reads to him at home. Juan said he has a TV in his bedroom and watches it "a lot." In addition to watching TV, he said he likes to ride his bike.

As another source of information about Juan's home experiences, I asked him to bring in three of his favorite things. Juan proved to be very interested in cars and seems to

have some vocabulary related to that area of interest, as indicated in his description of the toy truck he brought from home to show me. Juan used a combination of verbal description and motions to tell about his objects from home:

I: Tell me about your truck.

J: "It's white and it has rims."

I: What are rims?

J: (*pointing to the shiny part of the wheels*) These things you put on cars. The doors open and close and it has bumpers. (*He demonstrated the working doors and pointed to the bumpers as he spoke.*)

Juan also brought a toy car. "Why is your car important to you, Juan?" I asked.

"Cause I got it and it's green and gray and the wheels are black," he replied. He explained that he liked to play on the floor in his room with it. "When it goes off a cliff it goes—," he finished his thought by motioning with his hand the path that the toy would take if it fell off the cliff.

Juan's third item was a collector truck that had been given to him as a gift by a family member.

I: Tell me about your truck, Juan.

J: It's a red truck and it does this (*pushing the truck with his hand*) and it drives in the dirt and I got it from a gas station. My dad bought it for me. And there were two more left and one had a motorcycle and there was another one than had motorcycles on it and I couldn't get it.

I: Why was that?

J: Cause I wanted this one.

I: Why did you choose this one?

J: Cause it goes fast.

This exchange represents the most I had heard Juan speak in a single utterance during the twelve weeks of observations. His descriptions of the toy vehicles were characterized by hand motions that completed his thoughts, descriptive features, such as color and parts, and a brief narrative about how he obtained the toy.

When asked if anyone reads at home, Juan's response suggested that reading is not a salient part of his immediate family's daily activities.

I: Does anyone read at your house?

J: My uncle. My uncle lives in Allentown.

I: What kinds of things does your uncle read?

J: Like a book about God.

I: Does anybody else at your house read?

J: No.

I: Does anyone at your house write?

J: My sister, my dad.

I: What kinds of things do they write?

J: I don't know.

When asked about reading at home, Juan said he has "about ten books at home" and that he likes to read books about cars and Tom & Jerry, which he explained was a cartoon that he watched on TV. He said only an uncle, who lives in another town, read in the family. When asked if reading at home and school were the same, he said yes, but could not articulate why. I asked Juan, "Does learning to read in school help you to read those books (about cars) at home?"

"No," Juan said. "They don't have car books." However, he later clarified that the words are the same in books at home and school. Otherwise, though, Juan seemed to see little connection between reading and writing at home and school.

Data from Juan's cumulative file indicates that he attended Head Start preschool and "Home Base Head Start" prior to that. He attended full-day kindergarten and began first grade at age 6 years and 9 months. However, when I asked Juan when his birthday was, he did not know.

On assessments of LNF and LSF administered in September, Juan scored 19 and 15, respectively. The only student scoring lower than Juan on LNF was a student that moved when I did my initial classroom observation. Two students (excluding Alicia) scored

lower than Juan on LSF, by three and six points; however, both of these students outscored Juan by 12 and 21 points on LNF. On the DRA the only students scoring lower than Juan's Level 1 were Alicia and the student that moved. Since Juan's scores were below benchmark, he was given the Scott Foresman placement test. He scored 84%, indicating that he should be placed in the "My Sidewalks" intervention program that accompanies the basal series. This program is correlated with the basal instruction in the classroom with regard to theme and is designed to reinforce some of the skills introduced during whole class instruction. On the untimed placement test, Juan scored 5/5, 5/5, 4/5, and 11/15 on tests of initial sounds, final sounds, blending of sounds, and segmenting of sounds, respectively. He scored 52/52 on letter naming and 1/10 on sight word recognition. These scores, when viewed in relation to his performance on the Aimsweb tests, suggest that time is a factor influencing Juan's ability to succeed in the subskills of phonemic awareness and letter knowledge, but that he has considerable difficulty with sight word recognition and putting the subskills of the reading process together to read connected text. This data suggests areas of relative strength in his ability to identify, segment, and blend sounds. However, during my six observations of Juan, particularly in his Title I class, where he engages in intensive work with letters, sounds, and phonemic awareness, I noted that Juan seemed to have considerable difficulty executing the tasks related to segmenting, blending, and writing. Asked to change the word "vet" to "pet," he began to write "pi" until another student corrected him. He did not seem to notice patterns within the words. Asked what the last sound in "red" was, he said, "/r/", suggesting, perhaps, more confusion with concepts of first and last than with sounds. A similar mistake occurred when he was completing a worksheet on which he

was to identify pictures beginning with the /s/ sound. He circled a picture of a bus. On the Aimsweb tests administered at the end of kindergarten in LNF, LSF, PSF, and NWF, Juan scored in the fifth, seventh, eleventh, and tenth percentiles, respectively. He received the designation of “Strategic,” indicating that he should receive targeted, but not necessarily intensive intervention. Mid-winter Aimsweb assessments in first grade on a test of NWF and a running record, indicate that Juan scored in the ninth and fifth percentiles, respectively. These scores suggest that in spite of targeted intervention, including subskill instruction and the reading of connected text, Juan’s struggles continue.

Juan’s Beliefs about the Nature of Reading

According to Juan, success in reading means being able to look at the words and know them. He considers himself successful at times, because he is able to do this sometimes but not always. Juan’s perceptions of himself as a reader vary, based on his ability to recall words:

J: I’m a good reader sometimes.

I: What makes you a good reader sometimes?

J: ‘Cause I only look at the words. Then you know.

Juan’s perception of himself as sometimes successful seems rooted in his belief that good reading is the ability to “say the words” with automaticity. Juan’s reliance on the rebus-style pictures in kindergarten continues in first grade. When asked what helps him most, Juan showed me the pages of his basal with graphic cues above some of the content words:

I: Is there a word on this page that is easy for you?

J: (*pointing to the word “squirrel” which has a small picture of a squirrel over the word*) This one.

I: Which one?

J: Squirrels.
 I: Why is that one easy and this one hard?
 J: 'Cause you can see the squirrels here (*points to graphic*) and you know squ—irlls.
 I: Why do you think you have trouble with the words sometimes?
 J: 'Cause I learn um and then when I read the book I forget the words that I learned in school...
 I: Does anything you do in school not help you very much with reading?
 J: The things that in reading I forget is the words.
 I: What gives you the most trouble?
 J: Reading hard words.
 I: What would be a hard word?
 J: Have.
 I: Why is that hard for you?
 J: (*pointing to 'they'*) This is a hard word "have". "Nabs" I know. He nabs the birds.
 As I probed Juan's perception of good reading as being able to "say words," he

offered a list of words that I recognized as being from his sight word list on the Title I board:

I: How do you know the words?
 J: 'Cause some words are words like "like" and some are..."to, "have", "a."
 I: How do you figure out what a word says?
 J: "I", "have", "to", like that.

Juan's perception that good reading is "saying words" is consistent with his view of Mark as a good reader. "(He) knows the words," said Juan. This is also consistent with Juan's contention that the biggest barrier to his success is "forgetting the words." Perhaps this particular view of reading persists because he has focused on aspects of his instruction that are consistent with his view, i.e., the prompt provided in the basal that facilitate a reader's ability to "say words" when they come to them in text, flash card drills, and sight word instruction.

Though Juan has been successful in developing his phonemic awareness abilities, as evidenced by the observation transcripts from 10/10/07 in which he successfully used letter tiles to spell three-sound words like "hat" and "map," there is little evidence in the data record to indicate that he sees decoding as an aid to reading connected text. Though

sometimes, with coaching from the Mrs. P or the Title I teacher, he attempts to sound out words, he more frequently relies on picture cues (e.g., the squirrel graphic), context cues (e.g., reading of “fireman” for “firefighter”), or the first letter combined with recall (e.g., substituting Rob for Rex). Juan seems to see other aspects of the instructional context as more salient than decoding; for example, when asked about the Saxon Phonics lesson, he explains it in terms of “asking us questions,” “flipping stuff,” and “she (Mrs. P) says funny stuff.” Decoding, for Juan, seems to be a task that needs to be done correctly, which can be accomplished by copying either from a model (e.g., coding “meek” at the easel while being coached to copy from the card Mrs. P held) or by copying from the board or a neighbor. Perhaps, given the emphasis on flash card drills of letters and sounds, Juan sees decoding as another memory exercise—one in which to date he has not experienced success, nor does he see a purpose beyond the immediate context.

Observation and interview data suggest that Juan sees print as having several roles, as shown in Table 12 below:

Table 12

Juan’s Perceptions of the Functions of Print

Roles	Evidence
Secondary or equivalent to pictures, people, and perhaps kinesthetic movement as conveyers of meaningful messages	During our interview about artifacts from home, Juan completed sentences with hand motions. On 11/28/07 he acted out a stomping motion in response to Mrs. P’s question about how the elephant in the story walked; when asked what time a story

	<p>took place, he showed Mrs. P the picture to support his contention that it took place in the morning. He focused on Mrs. P with greater frequency than text during instruction (See Ch. 3, Fig. 6). Speaking of Mark as a good reader during our interview, Juan said, “He looks (at the pictures of the people in the book) and then he says the words too.” (<i>interview</i>)</p>
<p>A model for correct writing and a source of correct answers in school</p>	<p>Observed copying work from the board and from neighbors (10/24/07; 11/7/07; 11/28/07; 12/5/07; 12/12/07)</p>
<p>Something to be remembered and recalled to perform school-based tasks of reading and writing; to be recognized immediately</p>	<p>“(Mark’s reading is good because) he says the words.” “The things that in reading I forget is the words.” (<i>interview</i>)</p>
<p>A medium through which he “does his work” to please Mrs. P</p>	<p>When asked why the teacher wanted him to complete a task at the Spelling Center, he replied, “To do my work.” (11/28/07)</p>
<p>A task to be done</p>	<p>“Doing my alphabet,” and “doing my work,” offered as explanations of activities during seatwork and learning center time (11/17/07; 11/28/07; 12/5/07)</p>

To Juan, writing is something that is copied, as opposed to a means of communicating original thought. When asked to write something as he would at home, he wrote only two words, one that he saw on a paper nearby and the other that he remembered from his sight word instruction. (See Figure 4.)



Figure 4. Juan's writing sample.

When he began to write, he wrote the word "like" carefully copying it from a book on the table nearby. "Oh," he said, "and I can write 'you'." He wrote the word on the paper, apparently from memory. Like Alicia, Juan wrote based on what he copied from a model, based on what he could recall, much as he would in Mrs. P's classroom.

Enactment of Beliefs: Juan's Perceptions of Instruction

Morning routines and shared reading. As Juan enters the classroom in the morning, he moves slowly to put away his belongings, taking a meandering route to his desk, which is situated near the front of the room. He stops near some classmates, as if curious about their activities. He talks briefly with a few friends, but his conversation is minimal. When he arrives at his desk, he busies himself arranging his pencils and erasers. Although most other students in the class have arrived, gotten settled, and begun on the

“Daily-Fix-It” proofreading activity, Juan’s book remains closed until Mrs. P goes to the board and enlists the help of volunteers to do the corrections with red chalk.

During most shared reading experiences at the easel area, Juan took his usual seat slightly to the side of the group and just slightly behind a desk. This seat enabled him to see the teacher as she sat in her chair, but he was frequently reminded to come out so he could see the chart or big book. On 11/7/07, Mrs. P put up a page of the big book for the group to read together. Juan was turned slightly away from the direction of the text.

“Too many people are not reading,” warned Mrs. P. Juan repeated the sentence that had just been read softly. After the activity, I interviewed Juan:

I: I’m confused, Juan. When Mrs. P said to “read,” what were you supposed to do?

J: Look.

I: Where?

J (*pointing to book*): Up there.

I: At what?

J: At the pictures.

Seatwork and homework. Copying was a strategy that I observed Juan using repeatedly and in a variety of contexts throughout the duration of the study. However, “Copy this,” was a directive frequently given by Mrs. P. Part of seatwork was often a booklet with a poem which was to be copied and colored. In addition, the listening center included a worksheet which had sentences to copy from a model. Upon completing the in-class portion of the phonics worksheet each day, where correct answers were put on the board, Mrs. P directed students to “Copy this. Make sure your paper looks exactly like the board, then pass it in.” After completing the journal entry at the board each day, Mrs. P, finally giving students permission to write, directed them to “Copy this correctly in your journal.” Further, on one occasion that I observed, Mrs. P affirmed Juan’s copying of letters from a phonics card she showed him. Juan had volunteered to code the

word “meek” at the easel. Obviously unable to begin the task, classmates began to call out prompts. Finally, Mrs. P held up the phonics card with the coded “ee.” He copied the markings from the model. “Very good, Juan,” said Mrs. P, “I knew you could do it!” Perhaps, then, it is not so unexpected that as I observed Juan completing seatwork pages at his desk, he frequently reverted to asking a neighbor for help or looked onto the page of a student nearby. Nor is it perhaps surprising that when asked to give a sentence using the word “am” in the example cited above, Juan, after two attempts of his own, repeated the sentence of his classmate that seemed to receive a greater level of acceptance than his own attempts had.

In addition to copying, Juan often engaged in behaviors that enabled him to avoid literacy activities. For example, on one of my last observation days, I knelt beside Juan’s desk and asked him to explain what he had to do on the worksheet. (Like most other worksheets he had been given since the study had begun, the task involved sorting pictures into two groups—those that rhymed with “rain” and those that rhymed with “bag.” Small picture squares had to be cut off the strip at the bottom of the page and glued in the proper place.)

J: I don’t know.

I: You don’t know? What do you have to do here (*pointing to the rain picture*)?

J: You have to put the stuff that rhymes with rain and bag.

I: How will you figure that out?

J: I don’t know.

I: So what are you going to do?

J: Cut.

Avoidance behaviors also included wandering toward the closet area and using the in-classroom lavatory. On 12/5/07 I wrote in my field notes, “Juan is hard to keep track of! Every time I take my eyes off of him, I lose him as he tends to wander about. Finally, he

sat at his desk and played with a clothespin while occasionally going back to cutting out a paper bell.” The context in which this never occurred, however, was Title I class; though he did not seem overly enthusiastic about participating, he did seem to enjoy the one-on-one attention and the activities required his individual participation at all times.)

Seatwork and homework. Perhaps, however, the most telling example of Juan’s privileging of some aspect of instruction over print, however, is evidenced by his performance at the Spelling Center. The following description and transcription was included in my observation notes on 11/28/07:

*I went over to the Spelling Center table, on which were the following materials: A large flat, sectioned box, in which were alphabet stamps, handwriting paper, and a laminated green paper on which the teacher had written the following words in a list: “Spelling List 6—run, cut, must, sun, up, bump, jump, bus, nut, rug, *many, *into. The starred words are “high frequency” words. Juan was working with another student and had what appeared to be randomly stamped letters on his page. They were not in a line—some upside-down, etc. The task is to use stamps to make each word on the list on the handwriting paper, the trace the word with a marker.*

T: Hi Juan, can you tell me about what you do at this Center?

J: You stamp it.

T: How do you know which ones to use?

J: Cuz, you go e,f,g, i, and p (*pointing to letters he had stamped*)—like that.

T: What’s this for? (*pointing to the laminated list*).

J: Um, (*shrugs*)

Later, after observing Mark’s Guided Reading group, I return to Juan who is still at the Stamp Center. It seems that the aide has intervened and redirected him to use the word list.

T: How does this help you?

J: It helps me good. Then I can do the alphabet.

(He has now stamped “cut” and “run” the first 2 words on the list.)

T: (*pointing to the word “run” which he has stamped*) What is this?

J: a “r”

T: Why does Mrs. P want you to do this?

J: To do my work.

I asked what his paper said. He sheepishly turned to his partner. The boy seemed to understand what Juan wanted and said “run” but he also looked as if he was surprised that Juan needed his help.

Such exchanges in the classroom as the above examples suggest that, while print does not seem to be a salient aspect of literacy instruction to Juan, he does, indeed, desire to participate in the literacy-related activities of the classroom.

Large group reading. As the class read a story from the basal on 11/28/08, Juan seemed to hum the rhythm of the words that the rest of the class was reading as a reader's theater script. When the story was complete, Mrs. P asked what animals they had just read about. Juan mentions an elephant, which was mentioned in the story, though this appears to be based on his memory as he is not observed paging through the text.

"What word in the story means that the elephant has heavy footsteps?" Mrs. P asked, directing her attention toward the class at large. Consistent with his use of hand motions to describe objects from home, Juan responded not with a word, but by spontaneously getting out of his seat and demonstrating heavy footsteps as another student volunteered, "stomping."

When asked questions about a story during the reading from the basal, Juan drew upon his own background knowledge. I recorded the following exchange, which took place during whole group reading:

Mrs. P: What time of day does this story take place?

J: It's morning.

Mrs. P: How do you know?

J: The sky is orange.

Mrs. P: But how do you know it's not evening?

J: There's no moon.

Mrs. P: Maybe, but sometimes the moon isn't out at sundown. Mark?

Mark: (*reading from the text*) "The sun is up."

The examples above suggest a willingness to participate in literacy instruction, though Juan does not always do so in the expected or desired ways.

When asked about the things his teacher did to help him become a good reader, Juan mentioned the reading and re-reading of books by the teacher:

I: How does that help you?

J: It helps me good.

I: How does it help you, though?" I asked again.

J: 'Cause it helps you, she reads one book and then the other book and she reads that book.

I: Why do you think teachers sometimes read things with you over and over?

J: Cause they think I don't know.

I: What do they think you don't know?

J: Um, the /e/ words.

It seems that Juan perceives the teacher's reading and re-reading as an aid in remembering troublesome words.

Oral reading. Juan's desire to participate in the instructional activities persists, despite his difficulties with and lack of attention to print. One particularly puzzling incident occurred near the end of the study. Mrs. P had prepared copies of a reader's theater script about animals which was distributed to the class. I recorded the incident in my field notes on 12/12/07 as follows:

Juan was the first to have his hand in the air when the teacher asked who would like to read a part of the play that was handed out. He was given the part of the zebra. Mark and Julie also wiggled their hands hoping to be called on; Matt received the part of Duck and Julie got part of Pig. Though Juan was supposed to go to Title I, Mrs. H was reluctant to take him when he was excited about reading the part. She stayed with him and as she quickly saw that he was having difficulty with the oral reading, she sat next to him and coached him through the reading. As Juan read his first line, he read, "Look at the—what is this?" The word was birds. He read the next line, then pointed to the third line and said, "I don't know what this word is." His reading was halting and word by word with frequent interruptions. Mrs. H finger-followed for him and coached him on the next section coming up, explaining later to me that she wanted to "help him save face—if that was possible at that point." He substituted look/like and do/be, as well as needing words fed to him. A peer corrected the look/like. He stood to read, though no one else did so. Despite this, when parts were reassigned halfway through, he again volunteered. As others read when he did not have a part, he looked toward each new reader as they began to read, and then he looked about. Occasionally he looked up at the teacher. I interviewed Juan following the play. He said he knew the words "because I looked

at em.” He did not acknowledge that he had any difficulty with the words. He could not articulate why he volunteered. This is puzzling to me. Mrs. H said he knew almost none of the words. *Does he know he can't read?*

Juan's behavior is puzzling. Perhaps, though, the meaning for Juan was in participating in the event, i.e., the “doing” of reading. He seemed to feel a sense of accomplishment rather than frustration or embarrassment.

Self-selected reading. As students finish copying their journal entries, they are expected to select a book for independent reading. This time lasts 15 to 20 minutes, depending on how quickly students finish the journal entry. When Juan completed his entry, he meandered slowly toward the lavatory and closet area, stopping to play with the sink and examine a few of the baggies on the closet doors that held items relating to the alphabet card to which it was attached. Then he went into the lavatory for approximately seven minutes. I described the incident in my field notes on 12/12/07 as follows:

Upon exiting the bathroom, he slowly walked to the bookrack and selected a large book about animals. He sits at the center table by himself and sings softly to himself as he flips through a couple of pages. He traces the border of one page with his finger. On the next page, a page with a two-page spread of a map, Juan traces the outline of the figure with his finger. “Mrs. P,” he called. “Look,” he said, pointing to a tear in the page. When she directed him to leave it for the aide when he was finished with it, he returned the book to the shelf. Less than a minute had elapsed from the time he had selected it. He goes back to the shelf and looks at a few others. He asks permission to take a book and puppet set. He carries the book and uses the puppet to repeat, “Mr. Eible,” over and over. The cover of the book lays open on the table to a blank page at the front of the book. He and another boy play with the puppets, moving them about and making animal-like sounds with them.

During an observation on 12/5/07, I described Juan's independent reading this way:

Juan chose a “look-for” book. He pointed to the pictures, kind of poking at them. He tapped his foot vigorously as he scanned the pictures. In between turning pages, he talked with his neighbor and looked over his neighbor's shoulder at his neighbor's book.

When I asked Juan why he had chosen the particular book on his desk, he replied:

J: It has pictures.

I: Any other reasons?

J: They're good books, cause you read em.

This response suggests some ambiguity about print as a source of meaning in text, and observation protocol data lends additional support to this notion. During 12 of 17 fifteen-minute observations, Juan looked toward the teacher “often” or “sometimes” when it was appropriate to do so. However, he looked toward the text “often” or “sometimes” less than half of the time when it was appropriate to do so. When given the opportunity in Guidance class to draw a picture (the only time I observed this “free” drawing), he drew a picture of his family members but without the labels many of his classmates had included.

Recognizing words. The salient aspects of teacher-led instruction appear to be task-related for a Juan, much like the seatwork. After a Saxon Phonics lesson, I took Juan aside and asked, “What was Mrs. P just doing with your class?”

“She was asking us questions, flipping stuff,” he said, referring to the inquiry-response-feedback cycle and the flash card activity that typified the Saxon Phonics instruction. During about half of the six focused observations, Juan appeared to disengage from the whole group instruction almost as soon as he took his usual seat slightly behind a desk, and, I recorded in my field notes that he began playing with a bit of fuzz on the floor, his trousers, or his fingers. Inevitably, Mrs. P would attempt to redirect his attention to the task at hand, reminding him to reposition himself so he could see the easel. However, although he appeared to be inattentive, on two of these occasions, he perked up immediately when the conversation turned from phonics to something else. One time a student asked a question about Mrs. P’s scarf and Mrs. P

made a joke. Juan immediately joined in the classroom conversation. The second time, the aide announced that the class would be playing a game. I wrote in my field notes on 12/12/07:

Juan came to life! Juan said, “How about the boys against the girls?” However, after a few rounds of teams taking turns “unblending” words from the phonics lesson, spelling them, and being awarded points on the easel, Juan seemed to conclude that this was not much of a game, and with the exception of the announcement of score changes between the two teams, he again disengaged, tearing apart a tissue on the floor, and looking about the room.

During some of the observations, however, Juan did attempt to participate, though he did not always have the resources to do so in the expected ways. For example, Juan sometimes volunteered to code words at the easel even though he had a great deal of difficulty. In addition to the example given above where Juan was asked and coached through the coding of the word “meek,” he was asked, on another occasion to code “lakes.” Stopping him as he put a macron over the “a”, which was, technically, correct, Mrs. P said, “No, you didn’t look all the way through to the end of the word.” She prompted him to “box suffix s first.” When asked to read the word, Juan could not. Mrs. P encouraged the whole class to read the word together. Afterward, Juan was praised by Mrs. P: “Good work, Juan.”

While Juan doesn’t always attend to the print during drills, he was not always disengaged. He mouthed the sounds and sometimes tapped the rhythm with his hands.

During the worksheet portion of the phonics instruction, which is completed at the students’ desks, Juan copies from his neighbors or, if he can delay long enough, from the board when the answer is put up. Perhaps, however, the copying is more of a learned strategy than a necessary one, as exemplified in the following entry in my field notes:

Mrs. P dictates, “three,” which the students are supposed to write on their worksheet. “It contains a digraph,” prompted Mrs. P. Juan, copying from the girl across from him, writes, “thee.” However, he seemed to notice that this was incorrect, erased, and rewrote it correctly on his own.

Small group reading. Juan’s guided reading instruction took place most often in the context of the Title I classroom with the basal intervention reader, a text which contained small graphic cues above some content words. Juan’s reading is slow, laborious, and often inaccurate. Mrs. H, the Title I teacher, in describing Juan’s reading, said:

If he gets a word on the page that begins with a particular letter, then every word on the page that begins with that letter is read as that word.” She further explained that Juan does not seem to know all of the letter sounds and has what she considered a puzzling tendency to read /i/ for the sight word “I”.

During my observations, I noted the kinds of things Mrs. H had mentioned. For example, even though he was corrected several times and prompted to “look at the letters.” He repeatedly misread “Rex” as “Rob.” When he got to the word “has” he stopped and asked, “What’s this word?” He continued to labor over the decoding, trying to segment each word, and sometimes doing the sounds correctly, but not always blending the sounds together again to make a word. He looked up at the teacher after each word. When the teacher prompted him to look at the picture as an aid to reading, he ignored her and continued decoding. He put his head in his hands when finished and appeared to tire from the experience.

Making sense of texts. Participation for Juan seemed more oriented toward the task than the print or the meaning. For example, as Juan worked at the Listening Center with Alicia, he paged through a picture book about a mouse on the Mayflower as they listened to a taped version of the story. Juan turned pages according to the chime. After the story was complete, I asked:

I: Can you tell me about this center, Juan?

J: It's a book.

I: Oh, what is this center for?

J: To do our work.

I: How do you know what to do?

Alicia pointed to the model worksheet hanging on the wall nearby, and said, "Look at this." Both children began to color their worksheets. This task-orientation, rather than print-orientation, was echoed as I questioned Juan about a seatwork paper that was returned to Juan marked in red ink.

I: Can you tell me about this, Juan? What did you have to do here?

J: You have to circle it?

I: How do you know what to circle?

J: Cause we do it every day.

I: But how do you decide what to circle?

J: I don't know.

I: What do you think Mrs. P wants you to do with this?

J: Circle like this.

I: But how do you know what to pick?

J: Cause it has a red dot. (*The red dot was marked by Mrs. P to indicate the correct answer.*)

This exchange typifies Juan's explanations of various literacy-related tasks in terms of the subskills of the tasks. For example, when I asked Juan about a homework paper which required him to use shapes to crack a code and write three-letter words, Juan said, "You have to write the letter. You look for the triangles and stars and hearts."

Trying to prompt Juan to see if he understood that words had been written on the line,

I engaged him in further discussion:

I: And then what does that do, when you pick out the letters that go with these shapes?

J: You have to write the letters.

I: (*pointing to the words which were to be coded and then read before answering the questions*) And how about over here?

J: You have to code it, box it, code it, underline it, cross it out.

On 12/12/07, I asked Juan about his morning seatwork, a sentence completion sheet:

I: Tell me about what you're working on, Juan.

J: (*referring to the bubbles that had to be filled in for the multiple choice answers*)

First, you color in the last one, then the first one...

Juan focus on tasks suggests that, in addition to not understanding how the tasks apply to reading, he may have difficulty talking about the language itself, i.e., metalinguistic awareness.

Summary of Juan's Perceptions about Reading and Learning to Read in Mrs. P's

Classroom

Juan comes to Mrs. P's classroom with a history of slow progress in literacy learning. He entered school with many risk factors. First, he was unable to write his name and had no knowledge of letter names, found to be an important predictor of success in beginning reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001) and of growth rate in reading proficiency (Speece & Ritchey, 2005). Second, he has poorly developed oral language skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Third, he is of low SES (identified by Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 as a risk factor) and he appears to have the kinds of out-of-school experiences consistent with this background that may impede literacy growth, such as limited opportunities for conversations with adults (Hart & Risley, 1995) and a limited background of experience. Finally, he lacks experiences with print, argued by Purcell-Gates (1995) to be one of the most significant factors affecting initial growth in literacy learning. Juan sees reading as the ability to recall words from memory. To Juan, pictures are an important source of meaning, perhaps because they are often a memory aid for rapid recall of words.

Literacy learning for Juan is about "doing his work;" i.e., completing tasks. Meaning is in the "doing" of literacy rather than in the semiotic nature of print. Juan has difficulty participating in the classroom literacy conversation, which he sees as due primarily to his

poor memory. The part of the official script of the classroom that is salient to Juan is the focus on the tasks involved in learning to read. He fails to understand that the activities, such as taking words apart, are connected to a semiotic purpose, that of decoding print to construct a meaningful message.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

And this, of course, is the real metaphor for literacy learning. If we adults listen and watch closely, our children will invite us to share their worlds and their ways of living in the world. And then, when children become our teachers, showing us what they see and delight in and wonder about and reach toward, then, and only then, will we be able to extend what they know and enrich their ways of knowing (Calkins, 1994, p. 53-54).

My goal is to allow the children in this study to share their worlds and ways of living, giving the reader a sense of the perceptions of struggling and successful beginning readers as they engage in literacy learning in a first grade classroom.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in light of the theory and previous research informing this study. First, I will provide a sense of context by situating the study within a theoretical frame. Next, I will discuss the findings by providing a summary of each participant. Then I will look across cases at the commonalities of the two succeeders and the two strugglers, and I will explore the differences between students of the two ability levels. Finally, I will summarize my conclusions and briefly discuss implications for the classroom and for further research.

Situating the Study

Positioning Perceptions in Activity

According to Vygotskian theory, thought cannot be separated from the individual's social and cultural interactions:

...there is an inherent relationship between external and internal activity, but it is a *genetic* relationship in which the major issue is how internal mental processes are

created as a result of the child's exposure to what Vygotsky called 'mature cultural forms of behavior' (Wertsch, 1985, p. 63).

This positioning of thought shifts the locus of perception from solely within the mind of the child to the child's positioning within his/her worlds—both in and out of the classroom.

This view of thought highlights the importance of looking at perceptions not only as highly contextualized, but also as fluid in nature. Extending Vygotsky's view of thought, Wells (2000) writes about knowledge, arguing that in contrast to "...treating knowledge as a *thing* that people possess... Knowledge is created and recreated between people as they bring their personal experience and information derived from other sources to bear..." (p. 67). A socioconstructivist perspective on thought suggests that a child's perceptions should not be viewed as fixed, unchanging representations of thinking, but rather as snapshots that capture thought as he/she engages in activity within particular social structures. These moments take on significance as examined for what they reveal about the meanings children take away from their instruction. I contend that putting together many snapshots of a child's perceptions as s/he participates in a literacy-learning community yields a rich and detailed collage that reflects the child's world as s/he develops as a literacy learner.

The Value of Perceptions

The value of this study lies, then, not in answering the question, "What is the child's perception of _____?" but rather, "What is the child's perception of _____ in this context?" In other words, "What meaning is the child creating here and now—and what are the factors that are influencing the meaning that is created at this moment in time—as s/he engages with a particular activity using particular tools, in a particular context?" An

important follow-up question is “How is the meaning that is created facilitating or complicating the bigger picture of literacy learning?”

A basic assumption of a socioconstructivist frame is that “cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences of mind, self, and emotion...” (Schweder, 1990, p.1). This frame challenges the notion that a beginning reader comes into the classroom with an empty backpack. A growing body of research explores the struggles of young school children in light of the literacy-related understandings they bring with them to the classroom (Gallas & Smagorinsky, 2002; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Work with beginning literacy learners that is grounded in this framework suggests that children bring with them experiences with different types of texts (Rowse, 2006), different levels of engagement with print (Purcell-Gates, 1995), and different ways of using language (Cazden, 2001; Heath, 1983). All of these “backpack fillers” mediate how instruction is perceived and have the potential to facilitate or complicate literacy learning, depending on the degree to which what the child brings to the classroom matches with the practices of the classroom community.

In the present climate of accountability and pressures to raise test scores, attention has shifted to remediating reading difficulties by focusing on skill development within the individual. Literacy is viewed narrowly, and out-of-school literacy practices and “funds of knowledge” brought by the learner to the classroom are marginalized. Yet some students continue to struggle, even with intensive skills-based interventions. A holistic look at the meanings children of different reading ability levels construct has the potential to yield important insights that will help children of all levels to engage with print and

profit more fully from their instruction. Focusing on the content of instruction and the instructional methodology is only part of the solution to helping struggling readers. It is only through talking with the children themselves and observing them that we can begin to see what sense they make of the many literacy-learning events in which they participate. Furthermore, while passing a test may (or may not) tell us that the child has acquired particular skills, it does not tell us how the child contextualizes those skills and what purposes s/he sees in the task s/he has completed.

Purpose of the Study

My aim is to contribute to the research base by looking at children's perceptions of the nature of reading and their perceptions of literacy instruction, not as fixed representations, as has been explored in the literature (Henk & Melnick, 1995; Kazelskis, et al., 2004/2005; McKenna & Kear, 1990), but rather as snapshots of meaning as created during activity in this particular shared community of first grade literacy learners. My focus is not on the "official scripts" of the classroom, i.e., the adult perspective of children's literacy learning, as has been widely represented in the literature, but on the counterscripts, i.e., the enactment of the child's perspective, which may conflict with the official script, suggesting possible sources of mismatch between learner and instruction (Gutierrez & Stone, 2000).

Using a socioconstructivist lens, I aim to "unpack the backpacks" of the focal students, i.e., examine the understandings, experiences, ways of knowing, and ways of participating that they bring to Mrs. P's classroom. Research such as Heath's work documenting the literacy practices embedded in everyday activities in different communities provides a "frame for noticing the resources students bring to school and

[provides] teachers with a way to imagine changing their pedagogy and curricula rather than assuming students themselves [have] to adapt and change (Hull & Schultz, 2002, p. 16). My goal is to better understand where mismatches may occur between the meanings constructed by the young literacy learner and the instruction as it takes place in the classroom.

To look at children's perceptions in a contextualized way, I gathered data by observing, conducting semi-structured and informal interviews with the focal children and their teachers, and examining and discussing documents and artifacts from the children's classroom and from their home. I constructed both individual and cross-case portraits of four beginning readers of varying ability levels in an effort to address the following research questions:

1. How do beginning readers perceive the nature of reading?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?
2. What meanings do beginning readers construct from their literacy-learning experiences?
 - How do these perceptions differ according to reading ability?

Contextualizing the Participants: The "Official" Voice Heard in Mrs. P's Classroom

Mrs. P shares the district's belief in the value of decoding—even over comprehension—at least at the first grade level. According to Mrs. P, "We're building up to comprehension, but I think the phonemic awareness and the phonics is the important one in first grade. Developing fluent readers is the thing in first grade and hopefully, the other grades build on that and you get comprehension." Mrs. P's contention that comprehension is built upon and results from fluency suggests that,

according to the official script of this classroom, becoming literate can occur in stages, with comprehension being a target goal that may be separated in time and space from learning to decode, and with decoding instruction being the priority for strugglers. However, Mrs. P's long held beliefs in the value of guided reading, and with it the importance of strategy instruction and exposure to good literature, add a layer of complexity to the official script of the classroom.

The official script enacted in Mrs. P's classroom is rooted in a "deficit model" of reading failure. Such a model is not without support in the literature. Much research has been done demonstrating that deficits in areas such as phonological awareness (National Reading Panel Report, 2000), oral language (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Pikulski & Tobin, 1989), experiences with print (Purcell-Gates, 1995), letter knowledge (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001), metacognitive abilities (Cox, 1994), and motivation (McKenna & Kear, 1990) complicate literacy learning in various ways for beginners.

However, such ways of looking at beginning readers conceptualize literacy as a singular construct, i.e., a set of skills. The notion of multiple literacies embedded in everyday practice is ignored, and out-of-school literacies are not acknowledged, obscuring the funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) brought to the classroom by each student.

Looking Across Cases

In this section, I re-introduce each student by providing a sketch that includes a vignette and summaries of what the data record shows about the student's background, perceptions about the nature of reading, and perceptions about the instruction s/he experiences. This is followed by a cross-case analysis of the similarities and differences among the participants.

The Voices of the Succeeders in Mrs. P's Classroom

Julie

“Mrs. P, I have to show you. This is the story of The Birthday Puppy. ‘I’m the author, really, but it says, ‘Ann Aquats,’ because you know, authors sometimes use different names. Aurora helped me. We were on the phone and I just wrote it down and did the illustrations. And we’re going to do a series. The next one is going to be the Christmas Puppy.”

“Oh, let me see this,” exclaimed Mrs. P. “Mrs. H, come here and read this with me-- and just look at these detailed illustrations. My, oh my! And you’re going to do a sequel?”

“Yup, we actually are—tonight!” said Julie, already at her desk, taking out her folder of morning work.

Julie took out the first worksheet. She paused for just a few seconds and got to work, writing words in blanks and sorting tiny pictures into categories according to medial vowel sounds and gluing them into place.

“Pledges everyone,” announced Mrs. P as students made their way to the carpeted area on the floor. She then handed a boy a pointer as the class read from poems printed on poster board. Julie watched attentively, even though she had read this poem every day for the past month.

Funds of Knowledge: What Julie Brings to the Classroom

Julie is a talkative 6-year old Caucasian girl who exhibits creativity, self-confidence, and a keen sense of humor. Julie could be the poster girl for Mrs. P’s description of a successful literacy learner in her classroom: “Those students seem eager. They give off

vibrations that they are happy to be here... Well-behaved, good listening skills, and a willingness to do whatever you ask.” Julie comes to Mrs. P’s classroom with these characteristics as well as many others that the literature indicates are important in beginning reading. However, Julie’s apparent readiness for literacy learning may have as much to do with her own personality and initiative as with her middle class family background. Although the family has provided Julie with a literacy-rich environment and communicated the value of literacy, two traits identified by Durkin (1966) as common to many early readers’ homes, Julie’s kindergarten teacher notes that the parents are not particularly supportive of the children academically and that Julie’s four siblings are often “out of control.” Julie reports that her mother stays home to raise Julie and her four siblings and that her father is an auto mechanic.

Julie’s kindergarten teacher believes that Julie’s success is due, in part, to her own initiative and her ability to structure her world in ways that are conducive to literacy learning. For example, one of Julie’s favorite out-of-school activities is playing school. The kindergarten teacher reported that Julie’s mother told her, “The girls play school all the time.” Apparently this is still a favorite pastime in first grade, as Julie referred to playing school during our interview.

The role Julie’s parents play in Julie’s choices about her literacy-related activities at home is unclear; however, it is apparent that Julie is a “paper and pencil” kid, which Durkin (1966) identified as characteristic of early readers. While the data record suggests that Julie often engages with literacy-related activities out-of-school, it also suggests that she persistently engages with text in school, as if drawn to the print in her environment.

Julie attended preschool for two years and attended full day kindergarten. She has consistently scored well in all measures of reading achievement as measured by the district since kindergarten.

Julie's Perceptions about the Nature of Reading

"...When they are done coding it, they have to say the word...If you say the word you know it right in your head."

Julie sees reading as either automatic recognition of words or, if the words are unfamiliar, the decoding and encoding of the sounds to access meaning. Julie never speaks of decoding without mentioning encoding as well. "When you're done coding, you have to say the word," explains Julie. Decoding words is a means to an end—that of recognizing the referent. To Julie, reading results in novel constructions of meaning, which can be utilized for a variety of purposes in school and out, including the accomplishment of work, the gathering of information, communication, and entertainment.

Julie's meaning construction as she engages with print is exemplified in many ways. . Whether she is asked to read aloud, which she does with obvious delight, or whether she is reading on her own, she adds expressiveness with her voice and facial expressions, adding an element of performance at each opportunity. She particularly enjoys humor and seeks out books that make her laugh. Julie spontaneously shares text with others by reading parts of text aloud to them, by telling her neighbors about a funny part, and by writing things down to share at a later time. Though Julie reads independently, she invites others into her meaning-making with print, using literacy as a springboard for social connections.

Julie's Perceptions about Literacy-Related Instruction

"I'm not too big on reading but I love books."

To Julie, the literacy-related instruction in Mrs. P's classroom is sometimes boring, but useful—not always to her personally, but to someone. In this respect, it appears that she considers the instruction valuable, but attends discriminately, taking what she needs. Though this may seem at odds with observation data indicating that Julie is consistently engaged and focused, the object of her instruction is not always the teacher. However, she nearly always focuses on some aspect of print, sometimes privileging this over attention toward the teacher. In fact, Julie is drawn to the print in the instructional environment, whether it was a single word written on the easel, directions on a worksheet, a decodable reader, or a story she had selected herself. To Julie, meaning can be found anytime she connects with print, and instruction is simply another opportunity to do this. Instruction as presented by Mrs. P, including Saxon Phonics rules, decoding strategies, and opportunities to read and re-read stories at the guided reading table are valuable tools for gaining independence in accessing meaning from text. To Julie, however, text and meaning are privileged over the tools and tasks of learning, and in that respect, literacy-related instruction is a sometimes boring means to an important end. In other words, instruction is a springboard for Julie's personal engagement with text.

Mark: A Succeeder

"Who can code this for me?" asked Mrs. P, pointing to the word "napkin" she had just written on the easel. Mark's hand was up before Mrs. P finished her question, but he was not called on.

“Morgan,” come on up here. Most of Mark’s classmates were fidgeting, glancing about the room, or interacting softly with their neighbors. The class was thirty minutes into the forty minute lesson. Mark’s eyes were riveted to the easel as the girl marked the word. “Napkin,” he said softly as she worked. His hand went up again, with obvious enthusiasm. “I can read it!” he said, though neither teachers nor students seemed to notice.

Funds of Knowledge: What Mark Brings to the Classroom

Mark, a quiet and reflective Caucasian boy of 6, comes from a close-knit, middle class family whose time together often revolves around some type of text, albeit, at times non-traditional, such as playing musical instruments or board games. Mark’s out-of-school experiences also include regular music lessons, travel, and playing with technology-related games and toys. Mark’s parents support Mark’s efforts at learning to read by providing him with a large collection of books, including his favorites—Dr. Seuss books. They also coach him when he has difficulty with big words by telling him to “sound it out.” According to a classmate, Mark was “a reader” even in kindergarten, often carrying his own books from home to school. His kindergarten teacher clarifies, saying that Mark’s word recognition was superior, but although he read quickly, he did so with little comprehension and no attention to punctuation or phrasing.

In kindergarten, Mark struggled with social skills. Though academically ready to begin kindergarten at age 4, his mother withdrew his early registration due to her concerns about his shyness and lack of confidence. Mark’s kindergarten teacher noted that even starting kindergarten with his age-mates, Mark appeared “backward” socially. She reports, though, that he blossomed during kindergarten. At the end of first grade,

Mark served as emcee of the first grade play, sang a solo, and announced that his career goal was “to be the next American Idol.”

Mark attended a church preschool for two years, attended full day kindergarten, and has consistently achieved high scores on all measures of reading proficiency, as measured by assessments used in the district.

Mark’s Perceptions about the Nature of Reading

“I can read it!”

Mark never seems to lose sight of the sense-making aspect of reading. He sees reading as accomplished through breaking words into manageable parts and then putting them back together again. Decoding is merely a means to an end, i.e., recognizing the word. Successful reading is viewed as the ability to handle “big words” by applying the strategies taught by Mrs. P, such as chunking, looking for parts you know, or skipping a word and reading ahead.

To Mark, reading is something done both at home and school for work and pleasure. Reading is viewed as an interactive process and often seems closely related to play. He prefers books that invite interaction, such as “look-and-find” books or books with puppets, and the interaction between Mark and the text is often social in nature, including multiple readers of the same text.

Mark’s Perceptions about Literacy-related Instruction

“You circle the right one that makes sense.”

Even in the midst of skill-based, sometimes rote instruction, Mark continues to privilege the sense-making aspect of reading over any other instructional tasks. He knows that as he writes answers to questions, the sentence that results should be sensible.

He also recognizes that when words are put on the board to be coded, a moment of recognition should take place, and this recognition of “sense” is important to him, as indicated by his enthusiastic whisper, “I can read it!” during a phonics lesson.

Mark values right answers, whether given as oral responses to the teacher’s questions, or on his written work; he can sometimes be heard whispering a heartfelt “Yessss!!” when he has responded correctly. He seems to enjoy the question-answer format of much of the instruction that takes place in Mrs. P’s classroom, as he participates eagerly. Mark sometimes appears to lose focus just briefly, but he always brings himself back, often prompted by a teacher’s question, to which he is quick to respond, or by her writing of a word on the board.

Mark seems to see the instruction related to decoding words as most valuable to his own growth as a reader, citing spelling as the part of instruction that helped him most in reading because he encountered the same words in both spelling and reading. He also mentioned strategies for encountering unknown words as important.

The Voices of the Strugglers in Mrs. P’s Classroom

Alicia

Seated at the kidney-shaped table in the Title I classroom with one other boy, Alicia sat expectantly as Mrs. H took her seat across from the children. Mrs. H held the book up and pointed to the letter “m”. “This is ‘m’. It says, /m/” said Mrs. H, holding the sound. “What does it say?” she asked, inviting each child to mimic her.

Alicia said a brief /m/ sound and raised her hand.

“Alicia?” asked Mrs. H.

“Last night I found a--” Alicia began.

“We’re finished with sharing time, Alicia,” said Mrs. H, not unkindly. “Look here and say the sound with me.”

On the third try as elongating the /m/ sound, Alicia rested her head on the table and said, “I’m tired. I didn’t sleep much because I had to do my homework,” she said as her classmate took his turn with the /m/ sounds.

Funds of Knowledge: What Alicia Brings to the Classroom

Alicia is a petite Caucasian 6-year old whose birthdate fell just prior to the cutoff date for entrance into kindergarten. She is pleasant and cooperative in spite of the difficulties she experiences in learning to read. Smaller than her peers, she appears younger than others in her class. She complains of being tired, yawns frequently, and sometimes sucks her thumb. The Title I teacher reported that Alicia’s parents seem “young but well-intentioned,” a sentiment echoed Alicia’s former kindergarten teacher. Alicia’s mother is an assistant at the day care where Alicia has attended “since birth,” according to documents in the cumulative file. Her father is a factory worker. Neither Alicia, nor her teachers thought the parents had attended college.

Alicia’s parents do many of the kinds of things often considered important in literacy learning, like providing interesting experiences and being involved in the child’s education (Morrow, 2005). The family recently traveled to Florida where they visited a zoo and aquarium among many other sights of interest to a first grader. In addition, Alicia’s mother spends a great deal of time trying to help with homework—two and one-half hours, according to the parent; however, these efforts frequently end in frustration for both Alicia and her mother.

Alicia said her mother reads to her sometimes, but Alicia seems to spend most of her free time listening to music on her MP3 player and watching Nickelodeon and videos. Alicia's preferred "texts" are not print-based, but visual, as suggested by one of her favorite things from home—a video. Uncharacteristic of Alicia's in-class discursive practices, Alicia "came to life" as she told about the story presented on the DVD. She included statements about the problem the characters experienced and some of the things she's learned about the characters, presumably from other videos.

Perhaps Alicia's parents fall prey to the commonly held misconception that the best way to help beginning readers is to focus on school-like tasks at home (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Perhaps when the focus of literacy at home is on school tasks, time is taken away from activities that are important to literacy growth that are not allowed for in the classroom, such as opportunities for pretend play, writing for one's own purposes, and in-depth, one-on-one conversations with an adult.

Not surprisingly, Alicia does not refer to any "paper and pencil" activities when telling about what she likes to do in her free time. She is also silent with regard to any play activities involving pretending, which may explain some of her difficulty with metalinguistic tasks (Pellegrini & Galda, 2000).

Alicia experienced difficulty with the school-based literacy tasks in the full-day kindergarten program; the district viewed her as deficient because she lacked knowledge about letter names and sounds and phonemic awareness. As a result, she received *Early Reading Intervention*, an intensive, skills-based intervention. As a first grader, Alicia knows a sound for most letters, but does not seem to realize some letters make more than one sound. She has difficulty blending. Her difficulties are magnified by her difficulty

in being able to talk about the language itself, though she has shown some improvement in this.

More subtle, but important as well, Alicia struggled initially with the question-answer format of her instruction. Different language patterns in home and school have been shown to complicate children's participation in the literacy learning activities of a primary level classroom (Cazden, 2001; Heath, 1983). Alicia's preferred pattern of communicating seems to be storytelling. Her proficiency in this mode is evident in her detailed retelling about the DVD she brought from home. She said, "This is a band, (*pointing to the words and reading word-by-word*) The-Naked-Brothers-Band. They're on TV and they sing and these two are in love but something happens and they, she gets mad and..." Such "storytelling" was valued only in limited contexts in first grade: prior to the beginning of the *Reading Mastery* lesson in the Title I class and during the Guidance session. Although given a place in the school day, storytelling was marginalized by its placement in relation to other aspects of instruction. In the Title I class, stories were allowed before the beginning of the "real" lesson, *Reading Mastery*, which is characterized by the same question-response-feedback format used by Mrs. P. The Guidance class was a "Special," taught less than once a week by an individual from outside of the school.

Alicia participated enthusiastically in storytelling each time she was given the opportunity to do so. This was a notable departure from her pattern of non-participation, at least verbal participation, during most class discussions. Mrs. H reported that Alicia always shared stories before class. During one Title I class, Alicia shared a story before the lesson and attempted to continue her story after the lesson had started and the teacher

asked a question. She was told, “Storytime is over.” During Guidance class, given the opportunity to tell about something the children like to do with a friend, Alicia raised her hand repeatedly to be given an opportunity to hold the “talking stick,” and, although she changed her response to match a previous classmate, she still participated on her own initiative.

Alicia rarely participated in whole class “discussions”, which were usually comprised of teacher question, followed by student response, followed by teacher feedback. However, toward the end of the study, Alicia participated more readily in Title I classes which also used this format. In the Title I class, Alicia met with the teacher and one other student. For example:

T: Why are these letters small?

A: Because they’re silent.

T: Yes, they’re silent, so we don’t say the sounds.

Alicia was catching on to the question-answer-feedback format that was a common part of her instruction.

Alicia’s Perceptions about the Nature of Reading

“...First my mom reads it to me and then I can read it.”

Alicia believes that reading results from remembering text and “knowing how already.” She values re-reading and the oral reading of text by someone more capable than she. According to Alicia, “If you read it over and over you’ll know how to read,” but, “if you do it only one time, it doesn’t help you.” In spite of Alicia’s difficulties with decoding, she displays a sense that meaning is embedded in print. This is suggested by her attempt to impose words that are known to her on nonsense word syllables she is asked to read during her assessments, her attempt to make a meaningful word out of

letters presented on a skills page, and her determination to continue thinking about her writing sample even after I tried to turn her attention elsewhere.

Alicia's Perceptions about Literacy-related Instruction

"I show my mom and when she goes 'no' and then when I go to another one she says 'yes'."

Alicia values the strong support and modeling of both reading and writing that she experiences in Mrs. P's classroom, and this has, it seems, contributed to her emerging notions about reading and writing. Alicia is learning that saying the sounds within words is valued in first grade and when she cannot recall words from memory, she substitutes the segmenting of words into sounds. Alicia has also learned that writing that is copied from a model makes sense to others, so she copies or uses "her list" whenever possible.

Alicia cannot always participate in the choral reading activities as her classmates do, by reading the words, so she sometimes does so by making exaggerated facial expressions. She responds more to the rhythm of the reading than the text, as indicated by her body movements and focus on things in the environment other than print. Alicia is most attentive during Title I instruction, which takes place outside the classroom in groups of two or three. She raises her hand frequently and is learning to respond in the expected ways. She also seems to enjoy read-alouds, but as soon as the classroom conversation turns away from the story itself, she tunes out. She seems to have little understanding of the use for Saxon Phonics and its role in reading, however, she seems to make use of visual cues and is often able to mark words or identify word families correctly when asked to do so.

Despite Alicia's difficulties, and despite her privileging of modes of meaning-making other than print, she persists in her belief that print is supposed to make sense. "Is af an animal?" she asks, looking at the letters "a" and "f" arranged on the *Reading Mastery* page.

Juan: A Struggler

Juan made his way slowly to the Spelling Center table, after stopping at his desk to shuffle some papers. He picked up a rubber stamp, tapped it on the ink pad, and made a perfect "p" in the center of the page. He picked up more stamps, randomly stamping letters on the oversized paper. The list of spelling words had fallen to the floor, but Juan did not seem to notice. After filling the paper with letters, he returned to his desk.

What Juan Brings to the Classroom

Juan is a Hispanic boy of 6. English is his only language and it is the primary language spoken in the home. He is not particularly shy but is not a talkative child. He seems to have some difficulty expressing himself verbally. Juan lives with his mother, father, older sister, baby brother, and grandfather. Juan's kindergarten teacher replied, "Minimal in both areas," when asked about the family's education and income levels. Juan reports that his mother works at the local high school, though he did not know what she did there. He said his father "lays streets" and "customizes cars," the latter apparently being a hobby that holds special interest for Juan. Juan's interest in and knowledge of cars was evident in his description of artifacts from home. Uncharacteristic of Juan's usual speaking patterns, he used specific vocabulary, such as "rims," and "bumpers" in his description. His verbal descriptions of the toy vehicles he brought to school were the most extensive discourse I observed Juan to engage in throughout the

duration of the study. Juan used hand motions in place of words to complete the expression of his thoughts. Kress (1997) validates physical activity as a mode of meaning-making but notes that this mode is not always valued in school in the ways that print is.

Although Juan has few print resources of interest to him at home, he enjoys watching TV and has one in his room. When not in school, he also likes to play video games, ride his bike, play with his toy cars, and help his father work on cars.

Hull & Schultz (2002) conclude that notions of literacy have been limited by the privileging of school literacy over out-of-school literacies. Juan's proficiencies in "reading" visual texts, the types of texts encountered in car detailing, and video games are unacknowledged and unexplored. According to the official script of the classroom, Juan is viewed as deficient because he entered school lacking knowledge in school-based skills such as letter names and sounds and phonemic awareness. In addition, he could not write his name. According to the kindergarten teacher, Juan also lacked appropriate social skills, despite having attended a Head Start preschool program. Juan's kindergarten teacher considered Juan lethargic and unmotivated and felt that this was a major impediment to literacy learning. She reported that he struggled with literacy learning throughout kindergarten, where he received the *ERI* intervention and attended the full-day kindergarten program. He made some progress in school literacy skills, as indicated by scores that placed him in the middle rather than lowest intervention group in first grade. However, Juan continues to have difficulty with phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge. Despite continuing academic difficulties, Juan exhibits a desire to participate in Mrs. P's classroom, though he does not always do so in the expected and

valued ways. His preferred modes of participation are that of physical activity, i.e., cutting, stamping, or tracing the outline of a book with his finger; and the “doing” of literacy, such as performing a reader’s theater play.

Juan’s Perceptions about the Nature of Reading

“The things that I forget in reading is the words.”

To Juan, reading is the ability to see words and know them. The complicating factor is forgetting—something Juan struggles with. Though Juan seems to be developing in phonemic awareness abilities and phonics knowledge, he does not yet connect these with the process of reading connected text, blending sounds together to form words only at the prompting of a teacher. Juan sees himself as “sometimes successful” based on his ability to remember words “sometimes.”

Juan’s Perceptions about Literacy-related Instruction

When Mrs. P said to “read”, what were you supposed to do?

Look.

Where?

Up there.

At what?

At the pictures.

Juan’s notion of recall being important to reading is consistent with the instruction he experiences. Juan notes that the graphic cues above some words in his reader are helpful in being able to “say the words.” The sight words on the Title I board and Saxon Phonics flash card decks also lend support to this “saying” notion. In addition, Juan was often praised for copying a model accurately, either verbally or in writing, lending credence to his belief in the value of replicating information from another source in literacy learning.

Consistent with Juan’s preferred mode of activity for meaning-making, he has a task orientation to instruction, i.e., he focuses on a task, seeing it as the goal, rather than as a

means toward an end. His focus is on “circling,” “doing his work,” or “stamping.” Similarly, decoding is a job to do in reading class; he does not connect it to the process of reading. When asked about what he remembers from instruction, he mentions the teacher asking questions or “flipping things” rather than the content of the lesson. References to the print itself or a meaningful message from text are absent from Juan’s descriptions of his instructional experiences.

Juan often seats himself in a place where the print is not visible, but this is not his focus. He participates by motioning, tapping, and “reading” slightly behind the voices of his peers. In discussing stories that have been read by the class, Juan privileges his memory, illustrations, and his “common sense” over text, but he makes efforts to participate, sometimes, enhancing his response with a gesture or body motion. During independent reading time, Juan “participates” by running his fingers across the borders of the pages, and tracing the outlines of the pictures. Though Juan has difficulty with both decoding and sight words, he has no fear of volunteering to read aloud, even in a whole class context. During the reader’s theater performance, Juan volunteered eagerly, and though clearly unsuccessful with the “reading,” Juan seemed to consider himself successful. Success, to Juan, seemed to be in the “doing” of reading, rather than the accuracy of decoding.

Funds of Knowledge: What Succeeders Bring to Mrs. P’s Classroom

Home and family. Julie and Mark live in homes where literacy is valued, modeled, and encouraged; in addition, both have literacy-rich environments with many literacy-related materials available to them. Each of these factors has been shown to influence early literacy development (Hess & Holloway, 1984). Both of these children have many

experiences with print of various types, including musical texts, board games, computer games, and books. Purcell-Gates (2000) argues that such experiences with print are more significant factors affecting early literacy development than oral language, at least for beginners.

In Mrs. P's classroom, as in most schools, written texts are privileged over other forms of text, such as video or art. Julie's and Mark's many and varied out-of-school experiences with print cause them to be, at the very least, familiar with this mode of communication common in school. However, the literature indicates that out-of-school experiences with print do far more than that, contributing to children's "conceptual grasp of the symbolic nature of print, their growing understanding of the alphabetic principle, and their knowledge of crucial concepts of print, in addition to their linguistic knowledge of written registers" (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 113.)

Oral language. While experiences with print may be strong predictors of early literacy success, oral language is an excellent predictor of long-term success in reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Though Julie and Mark differ in the amount of talking they do, both are highly articulate, using sophisticated vocabulary and complete, well-developed sentences. Morrow (2005) explains the link between oral language and the reading process:

Past theory held that it was not our accumulation of letters and words that led to competent reading. Now we realize that our ability to understand what we are reading is based on our *reconstruction* of the meaning behind a printed word. Such reconstruction is based on our previous experience with the topic, our familiarity with its main concepts, and our general knowledge of how language works (p. 75). The notion of oral language mediating not just decoding but also comprehension becomes clear when reading is viewed as not simply a process of decoding words on the page but of constructing meaning from text.

Both Julie and Mark also demonstrate a keen ability to utilize oral language effectively as they engage in the participation structures of Mrs. P's classroom. The question-response-feedback cycle is one in which they seem to feel comfortable, as evidenced by their prompt and appropriate answers to Mrs. P's questions. In addition, when appropriate, they go beyond the classroom, drawing upon and sharing their own experiences in acceptable ways, as illustrated by Julie's reference to the *Arthur* television show when responding to Mrs. P's request for a prediction about the story she was reading. The work of Cazden (2001) and Heath (1983) who studied the match between discursive practices at home and school suggests that a child's ability to participate in classroom conversations is facilitated or complicated, at least in part, by patterns of communication in the home. Such patterns, including ways of questioning, ways of describing, and ways of retelling events, can have a considerable impact on school success (Heath, 1983).

Metacognitive abilities. Julie and Mark not only use language well to communicate, but they also use language to talk about language, i.e., exhibit metalinguistic awareness, a predictor of success in literacy learning (Adams, Treiman, & Pressley, 1998). Pellegrini & Galda (2000) posit that metalinguistic awareness emerges from children's pretend play, which requires a child to think about language as they give voice to props such as dolls and other toys. Both Julie and Mark describe pretending as part of their favorite types of play, though they do so in different contexts, Julie as she plays school, and Mark as he engages with pretend pets on the internet. In addition, Julie uses texts she appropriates from her in-school experiences, such as a letter to parents, as part of playing

school, and both succeeders use texts in playful ways, demonstrating the fluidity between uses of literacy in and out of school (Rowse, 2006).

The Nature of Reading as Perceived by Succeeders

A decoding process. Consistent with the pilot study (Brown, 2007), the succeeders in this study viewed reading as a process of decoding words. When asked how I would learn to read if I were a beginner, Mark said without hesitation, “I would tell you that you have to sound it out or chunk it.” He went on to explain that these terms, “sounding it out” and “chunking it” were different. Using a text that was nearby, he pointed to the word “December” and demonstrated. Similarly, Julie said, “Well if there’s one word you don’t know you chunk it, like you split something in half like a pie or a pizza.” It seems important to note that both followed up their explanations of decoding with references to putting the parts of the word together again. “And there you have the whole word, ‘December,’” said Mark. Julie followed up her explanation with, “If it’s a word, you say one part of the word and the other part of the word and say it together and it’s the whole word.” Their explanations suggest that that when the word is put together again, there is a moment of recognition, i.e., some type of connection with meaning.

Meaning as constructed from print. The succeeders’ perception of reading as decoding and encoding words to evoke a meaningful referent suggests that they view meaning as constructed in the transaction between reader and text, much like

Rosenblatt’s (2005) transactional model of the reading process. Rosenblatt states:

Every reading is an event, or a transaction ...The ‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text. The term *text*, denotes then a set of signs capable of being interpreted as verbal symbols (p. 7).

Observations of the succeeders' responses to texts lend support to the notion that they view reading in this way. Julie selected a book for independent reading "'Cause I never read it." Her giggles, smiles, and furrowed brow suggest that she encountered ideas that amused and puzzled her as she read—both responses that indicate that the meaning she constructs is not entirely expected. Both succeeders also engaged with the literature in various ways, suggesting that they go beyond decoding the text and read for a meaningful purpose. Mark was entertained by a particular format of book, the "Look-and-Find" books that, although the print is minimal, kept him engaged over the course of several weeks of observations. As he and two friends engaged with these texts, Mark read the directions on some of the pages, indicating what they were to find. The boys negotiated the meanings of this text, sometimes arguing about whether a particular figure was actually what was implied in the text. Julie referred to books for help in drawing with a friend. She also copied things from books, like the dictionary, to share with others.

In addition, when asked about his homework papers that required the completion of sentences he explained to me that the words "are supposed to make sense." In other words, he, as a reader, should be able to construct some meaning from the text if he has completed the exercise correctly. Each of these examples illustrates Mark's belief that reading is, for him, a process of constructing meaning from text. The responsibility for this rests with him as a reader and is a task which can be completed independent of others, peers or adults, unless he runs into words he cannot decode using his own resources.

The succeeders seemed to come to print much as miners with "gold fever"! They do not simply notice print, but they are drawn to it. One morning during which the students

had done more sitting and listening than usual and bad weather promised to prevent outdoor recess, Mrs. P decided that the class needed a brief “field trip” before the Saxon Phonics lesson (which would require more sitting and listening). She took them on a walk through the hallways of Peters Elementary. First they visited the Kindergarten wing, which also housed a Head Start classroom, and then they headed to the opposite end of the building and upstairs, to the second grade wing. As the class passed the Head Start classroom, Julie, pointing to the window on which there was a sign reading “Head Start” exclaimed, “Oh, *there’s* the Head Start classroom!” as if she was surprised to learn its location. Given her emphasis on the word “there’s” and that there was nothing to distinguish this particular classroom from the others on that hallway, I suspected that she had read the words on the sign that identified the classroom as such. Upstairs, in the second grade wing, Julie fell behind the group as she read the poems written by the second grades and displayed in the hallways. Julie called me over to see one poem in particular. She said that the student who wrote the poem had been her “book buddy” last year when she (Julie) was in kindergarten. She pointed out the name and read the poem aloud to me, exclaiming, “Isn’t that funny?” Julie’s classmates were nowhere in sight, but she had found another treasure in print.

Succeeders’ Perceptions of Instruction

The tools. The tools of learning, specifically books, are important to both struggling and successful beginning readers. However, the data suggests that strugglers and succeeders value them and interact with them in different ways. To the succeeder, the value of books is in the transaction they evoke between reader and text. One afternoon, as Mrs. P worked at the easel with a group of students who had experienced difficulty on

a worksheet, the others in the class had independent reading time. Julie sat cross-legged in a chair near the bookshelf. She smiled to herself and giggled softly as she read. When Mrs. P finished with the group, Julie shared her book with Mrs. P, pointing to some pictures and said, “This is SO funny!” Mrs. P spontaneously asked Julie to read the story to the class. Julie sat back down in the chair and the students stopped what they were doing. Some stood where they were, but most came over to sit on the floor near Julie. Julie read the story aloud fluently and with much expression, and, giggling, pointed out the parts she found humorous—particularly Santa in his underwear. This was just one of many times I observed Julie thoroughly enjoying a book and wanting to share it with others. Her choice of a children’s dictionary during independent reading time resulted in her copying the “information” she found meaningful. Again, the meaning she found was humor, and it was important enough to her that she decided to write it down for herself.

The value of books to Julie is different from that of Alicia and Juan. Julie values books for the personal meaning she gains from them, meaning that is quite separate from school purposes for reading books. Julie finds personal satisfaction in even a source as unlikely as the dictionary. She makes the information her own by copying what is in the text, expanding on the text by drawing, and sharing her discoveries with others.

Similarly, Mark also seemed to value books for the meaning he gained personally. The good-natured give-and-take during the group reading of the look-and-find books, his efforts to imitate the signs in the sign language alphabet book, and his description of home reading activities, including Dr. Seuss books and playing games related to the Harry Potter books suggests that he finds books objects of enjoyment.

Learning to recognize words. Mrs. P's valuing of Saxon Phonics rules is evident in the classroom environment, in her choices about scheduling, in her conversation, and in her instruction. Saxon Phonics rules are posted in the classroom as they are learned. Written by Mrs. P on sentence strips and laminated, a strip is added each time the class learns a new rule. Mrs. P does not just teach phonics during the thirty to forty minute Saxon Phonics time, though. She integrates phonics throughout the day, frequently reminding children of the rules they have learned and their uses in reading and writing. "Remember your Saxon Phonics rules," she repeated several times in the course of each day that I observed. But although it appears that she has succeeded in convincing her students that phonics, specifically taking words apart, is an important part of learning to read, neither the succeeders nor the strugglers seem to attach the kind of value to phonics that Mrs. P does.

The succeeders echo Mrs. P's belief that Saxon Phonics rules are an important part of learning to read. However, while Mrs. P is focused on developing the decoding and fluency skills of her first graders, the succeeders seem to place themselves beyond this. Their view of themselves as proficient relegates the role of Saxon Phonics to a place of secondary importance. It is not that they consider it unimportant, but it does not occupy their thinking unless the meaning-making process begins to break down during their encounter with an unknown word. When asked about the kinds of things Mrs. P does to help students learn to be good readers, Julie immediately referred to Saxon Phonics, but as she explained, she implied that it was more important for strugglers than for succeeders like herself.

J: It doesn't really help me 'cause I already know!

I: Do you think it helps other kids?

J: It helps them 'cause some other kids like Noah like they have sometimes trouble reading so it helps them to read sort of and it helps them know the sound in case they forget the sound.

Though Mark is more subtle in his discussion of the value of Saxon Phonics, he views phonics similarly:

T: How does it (Saxon Phonics) help you?

M: Um, maybe if we don't know what kind of letter, then it tells us and we know it.

To both of the succeeders, phonics is a tool, i.e., a means to an end—that of putting a word back together in order to recognize the referent. To the succeeder, phonics is useful on the occasion when meaning cannot be constructed because of difficulty figuring out the sounds within a word. However, the tool is always used as a means to put a word back together, and both succeeders speak of the necessity of using phonics as somewhat of an interruption to the reading process, i.e., the flow of meaning construction.

Strategy instruction. During our interview, Mrs. P referred to “The Five Finger Approach,” (to figuring out unknown words). Both Mark and Julie referred to these strategies.

Julie: ...And if you come to a word you don't know, you have to look at the picture, sound it out, chunk it, try again, or skip it.

Mark: There's five things that Mrs. P helps us about. One thing is chunking, where you do one sound then the next sound. The second one is try again. The third one sound it out...

However, when I questioned the succeeders as they worked, they only mentioned sounding out and chunking words as strategies they used when they got stuck. Likewise, when I observed guided reading groups, the groups chanted the strategies prior to reading, but were coached to “Sound it out,” or “Use your phonics,” when stuck on a word.

Funds of Knowledge: What Strugglers Bring to Mrs. P's Classroom

Home and family. Alicia's and Juan's families appear to differ in an important way: parental support for literacy learning as it takes place in Mrs. P's classroom. Though Juan's parents and older sister no doubt engage in some reading and writing for their own purposes, this is not as salient to Juan as it is to Alicia. Perhaps through attention to homework, however negative the experience may be, the occasional bedtime story, or the writing that Alicia sees her mother do "with a pen, like magic," Alicia has, to some extent, grasped the importance of school-based literacy. Durkin (1966), in studying early readers, notes that parents communicate their own valuing of literacy by reading to them, answering questions, and helping with challenges. Although Alicia's out-of-school experiences with print seem to be primarily for school purposes, Alicia exhibits an awareness of reading and writing as it occurs in her home. Her family background may contribute to her willingness to persist in school-based literacy learning even as she faces considerable obstacles.

Juan, on the other hand, apparently has no such awareness of print being valued by family members. When asked if anyone reads to him at home, he stated emphatically, "No one reads to me." According to Juan, family activities include watching TV together, going to birthday parties, or eating at McDonald's.

Consistent with Thomas' (1984) study that found differences in the play preferences of successful and struggling readers, both Alicia and Juan prefer activities other than those involving reading and writing; Thomas notes that the significance of such play patterns reflects differences of literally years of experience with print between strugglers and succeeders. The data record in this study suggests that such preferences for non-

print-related activities extends into the classroom, perhaps further widening the gap of literacy experience between strugglers and succeeders.

Experiences with print. Juan and Alicia attend to the literacy-rich environment of Mrs. P's classroom in ways that are strikingly different from the succeeders. Purcell-Gates (1995) found that even when provided with print-related resources, the family members she studied did not utilize the resources nor did they attend to the print in their every day lives as she had expected. In her later work, Purcell-Gates (2000) argues that experiences with print have a greater impact on the academic success of beginners than oral language. Although the strugglers' out-of-school experiences with print have been studied only indirectly, their in-school experiences provide strong evidence that neither Alicia nor Juan attend to the print in their environment as the succeeders do. When reading from a chart, even a pointer is not sufficient to prompt attention to the text; strugglers appear to rely on memory or on the support of the other voices in the class to participate. When Mrs. P works with the strugglers individually, following the line of print for them as someone else reads, the strugglers were observed to follow while she was present. When her hand was removed from the desk, their eyes followed her or they followed the text for a short time and then disengaged. In contrast to the succeeders, who are drawn to text of all kinds, strugglers do not seem to notice they are surrounded by it.

Oral language. The reasons for Juan's oral language issues are not clear, but he has noticeable difficulties in formulating appropriate response to questions. For example:

I: How is reading at home the same as reading at school?

J: 'Cause then you know at home and then you know at school, so that's two things.

The correlation between oral language abilities and reading has been clearly established, including links between language pre-reading skills (Wise, Sevcik, Morris, Lovett, &

Wolf, 2007) and decoding (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Ruddell & Ruddell (1995) go a step further, arguing that oral language mediates not just decoding, but comprehension of text as well. A landmark study of oral language by Hart & Risley (2003) offers convincing evidence that the language opportunities of children from lower SES families, like Juan's, are vastly different from those of middle SES and high SES children, with the poorest children hearing 1500 fewer words per hour at home than the wealthiest children. Furthermore, there is evidence that vocabulary knowledge affects phonemic awareness (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001) and vocabulary knowledge at age three correlates with some aspects of reading achievement, even in third grade (Hart & Risley, 2003).

However, Juan's out-of-school experiences seem to be rich in activity, with "doing" being salient to Juan. For example, his father "lays streets," and "customizes cars." He has obviously learned some of the specialized vocabulary used by his father. Perhaps other family members blend gesture, activity, and language as Juan does, but such information is outside of the bounds of this study.

Strugglers' Perceptions of the Nature of Reading

Reading as a remembering process. Strugglers see reading as an act of remembering, based on hearing the text read prior to his/her own transaction with the text. However, Alicia's initial response reflects her perception that "sounding out" is integral to "reading":

I: If that were our reading book, can you show me what you would do (if I didn't know how to read)?

A: I'd tell you to point your finger at the word and if you get it wrong you have to do it all over again.

I: Oh, ok. Well, let me see. If I didn't know that word, what would I do?

A: You have to sound it out.

I: How would I do that?

A: You um you put your finger under the word and you just go t-o-t.

I: What does that say?

A: T-o-t

Alicia has latched onto the idea of segmenting words into phonemes, no doubt as a result of the intensive phonemic awareness training that is inherent in *Reading Mastery* as well as the attention given to the sounds within words in *Saxon Phonics*, and she associates this task with “reading.” Focusing on one cueing system, such as phonetics, is not unusual, and in fact can be a normal part of developing as a reader. McGee & Richgels (2000) conceptualize the typical 5-to-7 year old reader as an “experimenter” and posit that “an important distinction between experimenters and more conventional readers and writers is that *experimenters usually concentrate on only one aspect of conventional reading and writing at a time*” (p. 85). However, Alicia differs from McGee & Richgel’s description of an experimenter in one critical respect: that of attention to print. They write, “Experimenters’ attention to print is much more purposeful than is novices’. Not only do they know that print is important, but begin to discover how it works—that the alphabetic principle is at the core of the relation between print and meaning” (p. 95). Alicia’s (and Juan’s) lack of attention to print is a stark contrast to the succeeders, and the meaningful referent of a word is far removed from the strugglers’ task of calling out the sounds of individual letters within words.

Unlike the succeeders, for whom segmenting words is a means of unlocking a word’s encoded meaning, segmenting words for strugglers is a task of recall, much like recognizing whole words. “Reading” is remembering words, but if you cannot, it is sufficient to recall the sounds within the word. Although Alicia segmented the word into sounds, she did not indicate that the sounds need to be put back together in a meaning-invoking way, as the succeeders did. The segmenting task, i.e., “sounding out” of words

is an end in itself, with the meaning being situated in the task of recall rather than in recognizing the referent of the word. Despite Alicia's reference to "sounding out" as part of the nature of reading, which seems to have been learned as a correct answer to questions about reading, Alicia clings to a belief that reading is remembering, which she states several times in different ways during our interview. (See App. M.) For example:

I: What helps you the most in school to be a good reader?

A: To do it over and over again.

According to Alicia, learning to read is rooted in hearing text spoken aloud. The most helpful thing her teacher does is to "say them (the words) to us" and that is how she will learn to read.

An unpublished manuscript by Evans (n.d.), as quoted in Fjellman (1992) sheds light on what may be occurring as strugglers and succeeders interact with text:

Three things can happen to attention: It can be absorbed, deflected, or unordered through distraction.

Evans suggests that deflective attention is the normal human state in the symbolic world. Signifier and signified are tied by a process in which focus on a sign causes us to deflect our attention to the concept signified: 'Our attention passes from the sign we see to the thought of the thing signified...subjects report that the sign has meaning'...These attention deflections—from signifier to signified to signifier to signified—create meaning, an ongoing world of symbolic consciousness. Each experience of an event 'will depend on both the mental set of the person having the experience, and his perception of the setting of the experience.'

But suppose attention deflection is inhibited? What happens if the connection between signifier and signified becomes unplugged?...When this happens, he argues, 'perception is thrown back upon the object itself.' This causes our notion of setting to disappear, and with the loss of setting goes loss of mental set, and with the loss of mental set goes the loss of deflective attention.' Without deflection, attention is absorbed.

The state of consciousness that results is nonsymbolic,' a consciousness the significance of which has no significance.' (p. 309-310).

Applied to the semiotic activity of reading, Evans' view suggests that text should serve only as the mediator between reader and the referent of the text, i.e., the meaning.

Only as the process breaks down is attention directed to the text itself, in which case the attention of the reader is absorbed by the task of decoding and is deflected from the intended target, i.e., meaning.

Juan's view of reading is similar to Alicia's. Juan described himself as being a good reader "sometimes."

I: What makes you a good reader sometimes?

J: 'Cause I only look at the words. Then you know.

I: How do you know them?

J: 'Cause some words are like "like" and some are—(*pause*)

I: How do you figure out what a word says?

J: Like, to, have, a

Juan's response to my question about figuring out unknown words was met with the recall of words from his sight word list. Though he did not use the term "sounding out," when asked about things that helped him to be a good reader, he attempted to segment the word "they" into phonemes, and responded, "/t/ /h/ /i/ /y/." Like Alicia, though, he focused on the segmenting task as end in itself. The ideal is to "know" words. Juan views the basal reader as contributing to his success and confirming his notion of good reading as "saying the words" because the text includes picture prompts above some of the content words.

Good readers, according to Alicia, are those who sound like "they know how to read already." Early in the study, I frequently observed Alicia sigh in frustration as she labored over a text that she was re-reading. Assuming that I was in the class as a helpful adult, she came to me and said, "What is this word again?" Her addition of the word "again" to her question suggests that she was, in fact, trying to recall rather than decode the word. Later in the study, however, Alicia's strategy seemed to change. She seemed to be learning that if you could not remember the word, saying the sounds was also

acceptable. She brought books to me that she was attempting to read by sounding out each phoneme of each word, with the exception of a few words that she recognized at sight, like “of” and “the.” Her requests for help in these circumstances were not with recalling words, but rather with not remembering sounds. For example, she brought a text to me from the daily journal writing activity that included the word “today.” She was attempting to read sound-by-sound, but could not recall if the “d” was a /b/ or /d/ sound.

An imitation of spoken text. Strugglers view themselves as dependent on previous experiences with text and the input of a more capable other in order to have a “successful” encounter with text (which may explain, in part, the lack of attention to print). When I asked Alicia about reading at home, she responded by situating meaning in her mother’s initial reading of a book. This was followed by Alicia then being able to read the book successfully to her mother:

A: Well, me and my mommy has this really hard book that I can’t understand it so I get to understand ‘cause first my mom reads it to me and then I read it.

In contrast to the succeeders who see themselves as meaning-makers as they engage with print, the struggler sees meaning in the “doing” of reading—the remembering, the decoding, the performing of a text.

Both Alicia and Juan come to first grade with minimal experiences with print outside of school. Though Alicia’s home environment seems more print-rich than Juan’s, both children show a preference for activities other than those involving print.

Walter Ong’s (1982) claim that literacy changes thought processes sheds light on yet another way that Alicia and Juan’s lack of experience with print may affect their literacy learning. Though Ong writes of individuals from primary oral cultures, i.e., without written language, his insights are valuable for the questions they raise about possible

differences in the thinking of the strugglers and succeeders in this study and how such differences may affect students' engagement with instruction as it takes place in first grade. Some of the differences in "oral thought" as noted by Ong (1982) include the preference for memory aids such as repetition, rhythm, and narrative structure; linear rather than analytic thinking; and thought that is participatory and "close to the human lifeworld" rather than distanced and abstract. Do Alicia's and Juan's minimal experiences with print impede their abilities to profit from instruction that is based on the logical, step-by-step building of skills? Do they respond more to the repetition and rhythm of their instruction rather than to its logic and does this interfere with their abilities to make connections between learning activities? Are Alicia's and Juan's participatory behaviors such as storytelling, tapping, bouncing, dramatizing, and gesturing rooted in their own ways of recalling information that is important to them? Is the distancing of the decoding task from meaning encouraging a focus on the activity rather than a referent that is removed from the immediate context?

The data record suggests that Juan and Alicia bring preferred modes of meaning-making that differ from Julie and Mark. While the succeeders privilege print in their meaning-making, Alicia and Juan seem to be finding their way into print through other modes. Alicia prefers oral language, specifically storytelling. Juan prefers activity and performance. Though the goal of proficiency in school-based literacy is common to all, students may have very different ways of learning to make sense of print as it is utilized in school.

Strugglers' Perceptions of Instruction

The tools. In the pilot study, books were viewed by strugglers as the key to knowledge and learning. When asked why the teacher read books to the class, a struggler answered, “Because we need to learn more,” even though the book referred to was a narrative; likewise, when the same student was asked why someone might read at home, she answered, “To learn more,” (Brown, 2007). A second struggler cited the importance of books in his progress as a beginning reader: “If you read like the whole entire book for the year then you know who to read and that means you read the whole entire book then you read how much books you want. That’s why she wants us to read...like we read a whole entire book then we know all the words” (Brown, 2007). Although the students in the present study viewed books somewhat differently, both did attach value to the books themselves as integrally linked to the beginner’s success. For Alicia, the value in books lay in the commitment of its text to memory, as exemplified in her many references to the importance of re-reading. Successfully internalizing the text for recall that manifests itself in reading that sounds as if the one reading “already knows how,” is the essence of being a good reader. For Juan, books are a sign of one’s identity as a reader. He had identified Mark as a good reader during our interview. “What makes him good?” I asked, hoping to get at what Juan saw as the process of learning to read.

“He’s the one who used to bring books when we were in kindergarten,” Juan said. Juan’s response suggests that the carrying of this “tool” signified one’s identity as a reader who could use such a tool with efficiency. In addition, earlier in the interview, when I asked Juan how he learned to read certain words that he said he knew, he said, “She (the Title I teacher) takes out books and, you know, this is the second book we

learned.” Again, he has foregrounded the importance of the books themselves, and in this case, the “mastery” of the books, in becoming a reader.

Learning to recognize words. In contrast to the succeeders view of Saxon Phonics as a tool, and Mrs. P’s view of Saxon Phonics as the key to unlocking the world of reading, the strugglers seem to view Saxon Phonics as simply another task to complete. The strugglers’ attention is not deflected to what is signified, but is absorbed by the coding task.

Throughout the study, the strugglers displayed a task-orientation to literacy-learning, which was evident in both observations and interviews. For example, observing Alicia who had brought a book to me that she began to read, I recorded in my field notes, “She attempted to read the title, reading “the” and “days” at sight, but trying to read “twelve,” “of,” and “Christmas” by making the sounds of the words—unsuccessfully.” In retrospect, as I reexamine that note in light of other data on Alicia, I question my contention that she was “trying to read.” I think she thought she was reading. Recalling Alicia’s view of reading as successful recall of either words or sounds and her puzzlement at her mother’s disapproval of her saying of the sounds within words, I believe that Alicia’s view of decoding is that it *is* reading. Consider Alicia’s frustration with her homework:

T: What gave you trouble about the words?

A: That every time when I sound ‘em out and I get ‘em wrong my mom got mad.

Alicia’s mother had called Mrs. P to report her frustration with Alicia—she could say the sounds but did not read the word. It appears that Alicia’s perception of the decoding task as “reading” does not match with that of the adults who are trying to help her.

The idea of decoding as a task which is an end in itself is not incongruent with a more general task-oriented focus on the part of both strugglers. When asked to explain instruction as it took place in the classroom, both Juan and Alicia described the instruction in terms of tasks to be completed. This is consistent with Dahl & Freppon (1995), who found that struggling beginners in skills-based classrooms had difficulty connecting phonics to the larger purpose and tended to maintain a task-oriented focus. For example, when interviewed at the Spelling Center, where Juan was randomly stamping letters on a sheet of paper, I asked him what he did at the Center. “You stamp it,” he said, giving a reasonable answer to my question. However, as we talked further about this activity, his focus on task became more pronounced. (See Appendix N for additional examples.)

T: How does this help you?

J: It helps me good. Then I can do the alphabet.

T: ...Why does Mrs. P want you to do this?

J: To do my work.

Mrs. P’s purpose was to give students a tactile and kinesthetic means of learning spelling words. A laminated poster modeled the correct spelling of the words. Directions for the steps of the process were not only printed, but also explained and modeled for the students. They were to look at the model, select the correct stamps to spell each word, and then trace the words with their finger or a pencil. To Juan, the activity of pressing stamp to ink and marking the page to create a colorful display of letters is salient. The spelling of words that evoke a meaningful referent appears to be lost on him.

Epilogue

After the completion of data collection for this study, I was intrigued as I examined the data, noting the differences in how the strugglers and succeeders seemed to view

phonics instruction. I talked with the Title I reading teacher, who works individually with Juan and Alicia each day and has established a good rapport with them, and I asked if she could help me to validate my interpretations. She agreed to do informal interviews with each student (App. O), the responses to which she wrote down and shared with me during a phone call. I wrote down everything the teacher said, verbatim, double-checking with her as I made my written record of the interviews. Juan's interview reiterates his continued focus, even in the eighth month of the school year during which he had intensive reading instruction, on the tasks rather than on the application or extension of the task:

H: I know you had Saxon Phonics this morning. Is there any part that you remember about Saxon Phonics that you can tell me about?

J: -ed

H: What about -ed?

J: You have to box it.

This interview suggests that even near the end of the year Juan was still focusing on tasks like underlining and boxing. Though this was his second year of intense, explicit phonics instruction, he did not yet see this activity as a tool for constructing meaning from text—a critical connection.

Alicia's interview is interesting for a different reason. It suggests that perhaps she is finally beginning to understand that there is a connection between decoding and meaning:

H: When Mrs. P does this (phonics instruction), what are you thinking about?

A: I just try to figure out the words.

What Alicia means by "I just try to figure out the words" is not entirely clear, but it suggests that the beliefs of the girl who tried to link the letters on the *Reading Mastery* page to some meaningful animal, an "af," persists in trying to make some sense out of the text in her skill-based reading programs. It also suggests that as the school year was

coming to a close, Alicia's perception of decoding instruction was undergoing an important change: Phonics instruction had a purpose beyond the task of decoding.

Conclusions

This study suggests that the four beginning readers in Mrs. P's classroom have their own clearly defined views of what reading is and how one becomes literate. Such perceptions, combined with the child's social, linguistic, and experiential background help to shape the ways in which they perceive and participate in their instruction. Consistent with the findings of the pilot study (Brown, 2007), this study showed that struggling and successful beginning readers bring different funds of knowledge to the classroom, shaping their perceptions about the nature of reading and their instruction.

Perceptions about the Nature of Reading

Beginners' perceptions about the nature of reading appear to be rooted in their understandings of the semiotic nature of print, with successful beginners viewing reading as a process of decoding text to unlock meaning and struggling beginners viewing reading as a process of remembering words and/or sounds. The succeeders in this study never seemed to lose sight of the notion that print signifies. The strugglers, on the other hand, perceive reading as a process of hearing, remembering, and retrieving either words or the sounds within words. Their attention is absorbed by the task of decoding, rather than being deflected to what is signified by the print.

The perceptions of the strugglers and succeeders are, in fact, not inconsistent with what has been learned about each child's social, linguistic, experiential, and instructional backgrounds. Both of the succeeders indicated that they had many out-of-school experiences with print, such as music lessons, playing school, using technology, and

reading and writing for their own purposes. Such experiences have no doubt contributed to a solid understanding that print *means* and they bring that understanding to Mrs. P's classroom.

The strugglers, on the other hand, have had different out-of-school experiences. New Literacy Studies (NLS) foreground the notion of multiple literacies embedded in everyday activities in the home, community, and workplace, as well as school. Though Alicia said she is sometimes read to and much time is spent doing homework after school, both she and Juan prefer activities such as watching TV and riding bikes. The literate practices each engages in at home is beyond the scope of this study, but the data suggests that home and family practices play a role in the students' ways of making sense of and participating in their instruction.

Consistent with the official script of the district, which privileges decoding over comprehension at the first grade level, the instruction for strugglers is focused on decoding words accurately, not always in a contextualized way. Instruction for the least capable readers focuses on rapid recall of letter sounds, blending sounds together, and segmenting words into phonemes, most often without a clear connection between the signs of language and what is signified. The succeeders bring with them a firm understanding that print is meaning that has been encoded. Alicia seems to bring with her an underlying notion that print conveys a meaningful message, but her instruction has complicated this notion, causing her to view reading as it occurs in the first grade classroom as a process of recall. Juan, who has very limited out-of-school experiences with print, appears to have little understanding of print as a signifier of meaning. His understandings about reading are consistent with his preferred mode of meaning-making,

i.e., activity, and with the instruction he has experienced. Like Alicia, he views reading as a process of remembering sounds or words, but not for the purpose of triggering a referent.

Consistent with succeeders' views of reading as a decoding process, they perceive themselves as constructors of meaning. The meaning constructed from print is both novel and personal. This is to say that the meaning is not something they have experienced before and they are not dependent on others to make sense of the text, unless they encounter words they do not have the resources to figure out. On the other hand, strugglers see themselves as doers. They attempt to recreate what they have heard, by repeating words and/or sounds. The meaning of the print is distanced from the reading process—a notion not inconsistent with the official script of Mrs. P's classroom.

The data suggests that perceptions about reading are more strongly bounded by the official script of the classroom for the strugglers than for the succeeders. It seems likely that the out-of-school experiences with print mediate the perceptions of succeeders, enabling them to go beyond the classroom conversation in ways that strugglers cannot.

Perceptions about Instruction

Beginners contextualize the literacy instruction they experience in different ways. The literacy instruction in Mrs. P's classroom, which is weighted toward the development of accurate word recognition, is viewed by succeeders as a tool to better equip them to make sense of text. Given that the complicating factor in reading for the succeeder is decoding "big words," or words s/he does not have the resources to decode, i.e., those that interfere with the construction of meaning, decoding instruction is seen as useful. Although the meaning of words is not always explicitly connected with the decoding

process during instruction, the succeeder has many in-school and out-of-school experiences with *print as meaning* from which to draw upon. They make their own connections, contextualizing the instruction as a tool for accessing what is signified by print. In other words, they go beyond Mrs. P's purposes in the classroom, and they use the instruction to further their own interactions with print.

In contrast, for the strugglers whose salient perceptions about reading are as a remembering task, instruction in decoding is an end in itself. The struggler focuses on trying to recall what they have heard, rather than constructing new meaning for themselves. Their attention is absorbed by the task itself, rather than deflected to the meaning that has been encoded in print. In the absence of a strong sense that print is meaning, the salient aspects of literacy instruction are completing a book, saying letter sounds, "doing my work," "circling stuff," or coding a word with the proper marks.

The results of this study suggest that in breaking down the process of reading into smaller and smaller subskill components, the meaning of print becomes further removed from the context. Unlike the succeeders, the strugglers do not have the firmly entrenched understandings of the semiotic nature of print to enable them to go beyond the classroom and contextualize the subskills as tools to unlock meaning. As a result, strugglers view their instruction in its component parts, just as presented, complicating their ability to make sense of print and, perhaps, even complicating their ability to profit from their instruction.

Most important, consistent with the findings of the pilot study (Brown, 2007) and the work of Purcell-Gates (1995), this study suggests that print does not mediate the meanings constructed by strugglers as it does for succeeders. This study suggests that

both strugglers and succeeders attempted to participate in the instructional context; however, Julie and Mark privilege print in their meaning making, showing a strong preference for participating in instruction through this medium. The succeeders participated in their instruction by sharing with the class read-alouds that they particularly enjoyed. They socialized around texts that they found interesting, amusing, or puzzling. They referred to text as they discussed stories with the class. They drew upon out-of-school experiences with literacy as they responded to Mrs. P's questions. Each of these means of participation is grounded in meaningful encounters with print.

In contrast, Alicia privileges oral language, preferring to listen to others and responding by sharing vignettes of her experiences. Juan privileges activity, participating by hand and arm motions as expressions of his thoughts. Each of these modes of participation can be linked to the out-of-school experiences of the children, including the ways they discussed artifacts from home and the ways they described their out-of-school activities. This suggests possible sources of match and mismatch between learners and instruction. More important, the data record suggests that these ways of participating have a persistent effect on the meanings constructed in the classroom each day, i.e., school experiences, even intensive remedial instruction, have not proven to be a "quick fix" for altering such behaviors.

This study is consistent with Stanovich's (1986) theory that successful beginners "get richer" as a result of more practice with text. But this study further suggests that perhaps for beginners, the difference between succeeders and strugglers is not limited to the reading of traditional texts, but encompass the moment-by-moment ways in which they interact with the print in their environment. Succeeders notice print, are drawn to it, and

engage with it. Strugglers lack such awareness—even when surrounded by interesting texts of all types. It is interesting to note that in spite of intensive instruction in the midst of rich print resources—including both a full-day kindergarten program and intensive remediation in first grade—such patterns have not been altered significantly for the strugglers. An observation of Alicia in December indicated that as Mrs. P walked away from Alicia’s desk, where she had been following the text for Alicia with her finger, Alicia’s gaze followed Mrs. P to the front of the classroom, even as a classmate continued the reading. Even more telling, during a visit to school in June, I asked Juan when his birthday was. “The blue one,” he said, pointing to the cupcake poster with “January” written in large block letters. How different, indeed, are the ways strugglers and succeeders perceive their world—Mrs. P’s classroom.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

An obvious limitation of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized to successful and struggling readers. This study represents the experiences of four children, two successful and two struggling beginning readers in a particular community in a particular first-grade classroom. However, this study is valuable for what it suggests about the differences in what children take away from the same instructional context, such as a scripted lesson.

Another limitation of this study is the indirect means of gathering information about out-of-school literacy experiences. Though this began as a study of the children’s perceptions, it became increasingly clear as I conducted the research that home and family were powerful mediating factors on the children’s success in Mrs. P’s classroom. Though I was able to gain an understanding of each child’s home and family background

by talking with the child's kindergarten teacher, by conducting informal and semi-formal interviews with each child and by having the child bring in artifacts from home, talking with the parents and conducting home visits would have given a richer understanding.

A second limitation is the broad scope of this study. This research suggests that there is much to be learned from looking at young literacy learners' performance in the classroom in light of their home and family background. Future research should focus on specific literacy learning activities. In particular, the experiences of strugglers in remedial programs should be examined in light of their links to the child's out-of-school literacy experiences.

Implications for the Classroom

This study is important for what it suggests about striking differences in how children of different ability levels make sense of their instruction—even instruction that is drawn from research-based, scripted curricula. Standardizing the presentation of new information does not neutralize the differences in children's meaning-making.

This study suggests that children's out-of-school "ways with words" (Heath, 1983) shape perceptions of in-school literacy learning. For this reason, links between home and school are important. Teachers should seek to understand children's home and community literacy practices, acknowledging their "funds of knowledge" and affirming, rather than ignoring the "outside social worlds" (Dyson, 1993), including experiences with both traditional and non-traditional forms of text, and recognizing the impact such experiences may have on meaning as it is constructed in the classroom. Though "Show-and-Tell" is a classic activity in the preschool classroom, it is often abandoned once children get to first grade. Having children bring artifacts from home yields valuable

information. The classroom teacher can learn about children's out-of-school literacy practices, including the kinds of texts they have experience with; preferred modes of meaning-making, such as through physical activity; and communication patterns, such as storytelling and other preferred discursive practices. This kind of information is important in creating bridges to support children as they find their way into print (Kress, 1997) and learn conventional schooled literacy practices. Dyson (1993) concludes that the new texts children create as they bring their out-of-school worlds to bear on in-school learning are the ideal scaffold for supporting schooled literacy learning. Marsh (2004) argues that the kinds of texts children prefer out-of-school should be brought into the school, not just to motivate but to affirm rather than marginalize home and community literacy practices.

Parent education programs should go beyond simply educating the parent, and be viewed as a means of educating school officials and teachers about home and community literacy practices, with the goal of forging links between academic and community literacies. Programs should also help parents to become more aware of the literacy practices embedded in their everyday activities, and they should be shown how to draw upon these practices to support the child with academic literacy. It is important that parents see the value in their own practices, rather than simply trying to re-create schooled activities at home. In particular, parents may benefit from ideas for seeing literacy in children's play and leisure activities.

Consistent with Kress (1997/2000), this study demonstrates that children, even strugglers, are experienced, persistent meaning-makers. Thus, the practice of breaking down the reading process into the smallest components for the least capable readers

should be questioned. Strugglers may benefit from instruction that contextualizes the skills; whereas the successful students in this study contextualized on their own, the strugglers did not appear to do so in a way that furthered their literacy learning. Helping strugglers not to lose sight of the notion that print signifies a meaningful message seems important. This is to say, call attention to what is signified, rather than simply the signifier. For example, when teaching letter sounds, do so in the context of real objects or pictures of objects with that sound. Invite children to look at the print in their out-of-school environment for examples of new letters, sounds, and phonics patterns. Most important, when teaching words, make identifying the referent at least as important as saying the word correctly.

Children should also be encouraged to use writing to convey their own meanings and to do so for a variety of purposes; they should then share their texts with others. Although the conventions of writing are important in learning schooled literacies, activities such as journal-writing as it takes place in Mrs. P's classroom, foreground the importance of "doing," i.e., copying correctly, over *meaning* through text.

The focus of students' attention during instruction yields valuable clues in understanding what children take away from instruction—and appearances can be deceiving! Strugglers may appear to be engaged, but may be engaging with an aspect of the environment other than print, such as the teacher. A print-rich environment is necessary but may be insufficient to promote engagement by strugglers. Strugglers need to learn to notice print. They may need more support in the form of hands-on, manipulative experiences with print and individualized attention. Recognize that as soon as support is withdrawn, the child may disengage. Student-created texts, such as stories

dictated by the child and written down by an adult, as well as print from the home and community can be used as “bridge-texts” that communicate the notion that print holds a meaningful message.

This study shows that as children enter the classroom, they come not with “empty backpacks” waiting to be filled, but rather with many different understandings that shape their perceptions of the literacy instruction they experience. This study suggests that we cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach to literacy instruction. Students’ out-of-school literacy experiences are powerful mediators of in-school learning. In considering such experiences and the meanings children construct as they learn, we better serve both strugglers and succeeders. Indeed the stakes are too high to limit the scope of our instructional efforts.

Appendix A

Consent/Assent Forms

Teacher(s)

Participating Teachers Consent Form
PERCEPTIONS OF BEGINNING READERS
Rutgers University Graduate School of Education

Researcher: Tammy Brown, Graduate student at Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, is conducting this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph. D. degree in Literacy Education. The study is being conducted under the direction of Lesley Morrow, Ph.D., Professor of Learning and Teaching.

Description: You are invited to participate in a research study on the perceptions of beginning readers. The purpose of the study is to give voice to the children as they participate in beginning reading and writing instructional activities in order to help teachers better understand how to meet individual needs within the classroom. During this study the researcher will visit the classroom on 12 school days. Classroom teachers will be interviewed for the purpose of providing contextual information for the study. Interviews will focus on the curriculum, as well as the teacher's beliefs about literacy instruction and the factors they believe enable students to be successful. Teachers will also be asked to give their perspective on the data that is collected and on the understandings that are constructed by the researcher.

Risks and benefits: There are no foreseeable risks or benefits associated with your participation in this study.

Time involvement: The teacher's individual participation in this study (during the interviews) will take approximately 1 hour. The class will be observed for no more than 12 school days as they engage in regularly scheduled instructional activities involving reading and writing over a period of 12 weeks.

Payments and costs: You will receive no payment for your participation this study, and there are no foreseeable costs associated with your participation.

Subject's rights: If you have read this form and have decided to participate, please understand that participation is completely voluntary. **You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any particular questions.**

Confidentiality: This research is confidential. Confidential means that the records will contain some information about the participants, such as his/her first name, age, and gender, but these records will be maintained in a locked file box. Interviews will be audiotaped for the purpose of maintaining accurate records, but all transcripts will refer to teachers by pseudonym only. The audio tapes will only be used by personnel involved in the study. In any written product resulting from this study, children and adults will be referred to by pseudonyms.

Research products: Your name and school will not be identified in any reports of the findings from this study. You will be given a copy of the report upon request when it is completed.

You can contact me, Tammy Brown, at 570-992-7908 or thbrown62@yahoo.com or, if you prefer, Professor Lesley Morrow at 732-932-7496 x 8119.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at:

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-032-0150 x 2104
Email: humansubject@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. Please sign below if you agree to participate in this research study.

Signature _____ Date _____

I understand that interviews will be audiotaped for the purposes of this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name (Print) _____

Signature of Principal Investigator _____

Consent Form

Parents

**Parental Consent Form
PERCEPTIONS OF BEGINNING READERS
Rutgers University Graduate School of Education**

Researcher: Tammy Brown, a former Title I reading teacher at Peter's Elementary School and Graduate student at Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, is conducting this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph. D. degree in Literacy Education. The study is being conducted under the direction of Lesley Morrow, Ph.D., Professor of Learning and Teaching.

Description: Your child is invited to participate in a research study on the perceptions of beginning readers. The purpose of the study is to give voice to the children as they participate in beginning reading and writing instructional activities in order to help teachers better understand how to meet individual needs within the classroom. During this study the researcher will visit the classroom on 12 school days. Each of the four children who participate in the study will be interviewed individually for approximately 30 minutes. Interviews will be designed to see what the child views as the purpose of the activity and their perceptions about what it means to be successful in the activity; they will also be asked about their perceptions of what it means to be a good reader and how people become successful readers and writers. Children will be interviewed either in the classroom or in the hallway next to their classroom.

Risks and benefits: There are no foreseeable risks associated with the child's participation in this study, with the exception of lost instructional time during the 30 minute interview. The researcher and classroom teacher will work together to insure that the child is given adequate time and individual attention, as needed, to compensate.

Time involvement: The child's individual participation in this study will take no more than 30 minutes. The researcher will observe the whole class for a maximum of 12 school days for a period of 12 weeks as they engage in regularly scheduled reading and writing instructional activities.

Payments and costs: You will receive no payment for your child's participation this study, and there are no foreseeable costs associated with your child's participation.

Subject's rights: If you have read this form and have decided to allow your child to participate, please understand that participation is completely voluntary. **You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any particular questions.**

Confidentiality: This research is confidential. Confidential means that the records will contain some information about the child, such as his/her first name, age, and gender, but these records will be maintained in a locked file box. Interviews will be audiotaped for the purpose of maintaining accurate records, but children will be referred to by first name only. These tapes will only be used by personnel involved in the study. In any written product resulting from this study, children will be referred to by pseudonyms.

Research products: Your child's name and school will not be identified in any reports of the findings from this study. You will be given a copy of the report upon request when it is completed.

You can contact me, Tammy Brown, at 570-992-7908 or thbrown62@yahoo.com or, if you prefer, Professor Lesley Morrow at 732-932-7496 x 8119.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at:
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
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3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-032-0150 x 2104
Email: humansubject@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. Please sign below if you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study.

Signature _____ Date _____

I understand that interviews will be audiotaped for the purposes of this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name (Print) _____

Signature of Principal Investigator _____

Appendix B

Observation Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Activity: _____ Focal Student: _____

Time period (15 minute intervals): _____

<i>Behavior</i>	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
Looks at teacher					
Looks at text					
Looks at peers					
Looks at things in environment other than those which are the focus of instruction					
Raises hand/volunteers					
Answers correctly					
Answers incorrectly					
Kinesthetic/tactile movement					
Appears to read orally/silently as directed					
Follows text with eyes					
Voice with peers during oral reading					
Engages in activity other than reading					
On-task					

Notes:

Appendix C

Protocol: Teacher Interview

Focus: Teachers' perceptions about the relationship between literacy instruction in the classroom and the focus students as literacy learners

Time of interview: Prior to beginning study

1. Please tell me about your professional background.
 - How long have you been teaching?
 - How many years have you been working with first graders?
 - What educational experiences (formal and/or informal) have influenced you most as a teacher of beginning readers?
2. Describe the components of the first grade literacy program at Peters.
 - Which of these components do you believe are most important? Why?
 - In what ways does the literacy instruction in your classroom differ from what takes place in other first grade classrooms at Peters?
3. Explain your beliefs about effective first grade literacy instruction.
 - What do you see as the primary goals of first grade literacy instruction?
 - How do you see your role in this process?
 - How does the curriculum you are presently using correlate with your beliefs about effective literacy instruction?
4. Picture the first grade student who is a successful beginning reader.
 - What characteristics does he/she most likely possess?
 - What does he/she look like during reading-related instruction?

- What factors (in or out of school) enable him/her to succeed?

5. Now picture the struggling first grade beginning reader.

- What characteristics does he/she most likely possess?
- What aspects of the present curriculum are most helpful to him/her?
Least helpful?
- What factors (in or out of school) are most likely to interfere with his/her ability to succeed?

6. Tell me about the student you have nominated as a “succeeder”.

- What caused you to nominate _____ as a succeeder?
- How is he/she like the successful student you just described?
Different from?
- What factors do you believe are most critical to this child’s success?

7. Tell me about the student you have nominated as a “struggler”.

- What caused you to nominate _____ as a struggler?
- How is he/she like the struggling student you just described? Different from?
- What factors do you believe are interfering with this child’s ability to succeed?
- What kinds of things do you do to support this student?

Appendix D

Protocol: Student Interview

Part 1 Focus: To get the student's perceptions about the nature of reading and writing as it is practiced at home and at school.

1. Tell me about someone you know who is a very good reader.
 - What is it about _____'s reading that makes him/her a good reader?
 - How do you think _____ became a good reader?
2. Do you think you are a very good reader or not a very good reader? Why do you think that?
3. Tell me about the things your teacher does to help you become a good reader.
4. What helps you the most?
 - What doesn't help you very much?
 - What gives you the most trouble about reading at school?
 - Why do you think you have trouble with this?
5. Pretend you were my teacher and I didn't know how to read. What would you tell me to do?

Part 2: Reading at Home/Family Literacy Practices

- *The child will have been asked to bring 3 items from home to the interview. He/she will be asked to tell why the items were chosen and how they are used.*
6. Tell me about the kinds of things you and your family do when:

- You get home from school
 - You get ready for bed
7. Do people at your house read? Who reads? What kinds of things do they read? Why?
8. Do you read at home? A little? A lot? Not at all?
- What do you read?
 - When?
 - Is reading at home like reading at school? Why/why not?
9. Does anyone at your house write? Who writes? What do they write? Why?
- Do you write at home? A little? A lot? Not at all?
 - What do you write? Why? To whom?
 - Please show me the kinds of things you write when you are at home.
(Provide with a variety of materials including paper, pens, pencils, crayons, and markers.)
 - Is writing at home like writing at school? Why/why not?

Part 3 Focus: Students' perceptions of literacy-related events in the classroom

10. Tell me about what Mr. _____/Mrs. _____ just did with your class.
- Why did your teacher do this with your class?
 - Why do you think you do this in school?
11. If you want to make your teacher happy during _____, what do you need to do?

12. I noticed that during _____, you _____(describe the child's behavior). What were you thinking while _____ (describe the activity).
13. Tell me about someone in your class who is good at _____ (name the activity). What makes _____ good at this? Are you good at it? Why/why not?
14. Does _____help you to be a better reader/writer in school? At home? How does it help you?

Appendix E

Frequency of Behaviors as Recorded on Observation Protocols

Mark	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>Looks toward teacher</i>	10/17 59%	6/17 35%	1/17 5%	0
<i>Looks toward text</i>	17/17 100%	0	0	0
<i>Looks toward peers</i>	0	6/17 35%	10/17 59%	1/17 5%
<i>Looks toward something other than the focus of instruction</i>	0	4/17 23.5%	10/17 59%	3/17 18%
<i>Raises hand</i>	14/16 87.5%	2/16 12.5%	0	0
<i>Follows text with eyes</i>	12/12 100%	0	0	0

Julie	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>Looks toward teacher</i>	10/25 40%	13/25 52%	1/25 4%	1/25 4%
<i>Looks toward text</i>	23/24 96%	1/24 4%	0	0
<i>Looks toward peers</i>	0	9/24 37.5%	15/24 62.5%	0
<i>Looks toward something other than the focus of instruction</i>	0	5/24 21%	14/24 58%	5/24 21%
<i>Raises hand</i>	17/21 81%	4/21 19%	0	0
<i>Follows text with eyes</i>	23/23 100%	0	0	0

Juan	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>Looks toward teacher</i>	3/17 18%	9/17 53%	5/17 29%	0
<i>Looks toward text</i>	3/16 19%	6/16 37.5%	6/16 37.5%	1/16 6%
<i>Looks toward peers</i>	3/17 18%	10/17 59%	4/17 23.5%	0
<i>Looks toward something other than the focus of instruction</i>	10/16 62.5%	5/16 31%	1/16 6%	0
<i>Raises hand</i>	2/14 14%	5/14 36%	1/14 7%	6/14 43%
<i>Follows text with eyes</i>	3/13 23%	3/13 23%	5/13 38%	2/13 15%

Alicia	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>Looks toward teacher</i>	3/16 19%	10/16 62.5%	2/16 12.5%	1/16 6%
<i>Looks toward text</i>	4/16 25%	3/16 19%	8/16 50%	1/16 6%
<i>Looks toward peers</i>	6/16 37.5%	5/16 31%	5/16 31%	0
<i>Looks toward something other than the focus of instruction</i>	8/16 50%	5/16 31%	3/16 19%	0
<i>Raises hand</i>	1/14 7%	1/14 7%	7/14 50%	5/14 36%

<i>Follows text with eyes</i>	3/15 20%	2/15 13%	7/15 47%	3/15 20%
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Appendix F
Summary Sheets

LITERACY AT HOME

	Struggling Readers	Succeeding Readers
<i>Reading at Home: Others</i>		
<i>Reading at Home: Self</i>		
<i>Writing at Home</i>		

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SELF-PERCEPTIONS

	STRUGGLING READERS	SUCCESSING READERS
<i>Abilities</i>		
<i>Difficulties</i>		
<i>How to Learn</i>		
<i>“Good Readers” defined</i>		
<i>Instruction</i>		

EVENTS

	STRUGGLING READERS	SUCCESSING READERS
<i>Description</i>		
<i>Purpose</i>		
<i>Self- Behaviors/ Thoughts</i>		

Appendix G
Discourse Analysis Questions
From Gee (2005)

Building Significance

1. What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in this situation?
2. What situated meanings and values seem to be attached to places, times, bodies, people, objects, artifacts, and institutions relevant in this situation?
3. What situated meanings and values are attached to other oral and written texts quoted or alluded to in the situation? (intertextuality)
4. What Discourse models seem to be at play in connecting and integrating these situated meanings to each other?
5. What institutions and/or other Discourses are being (re-)produced in this situation and how are they being stabilized or transformed in the act?

Building Activities

6. What is the larger or main activity or set of activities going on in the situation?
7. What sub-activities compose this activity(ies)?
8. What actions compose these subactivities?

Building Identities

9. What identities (roles, positions), with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), and values, seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?
10. How are these identities stabilized or transformed in the situation?
11. In terms of identities, activities, and relationships, what Discourses are relevant (and irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

Building Relationships

12. What sorts of social relationships seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?
13. How are these social relationships stabilized or transformed in the situation?
14. How are other oral or written texts quoted or alluded to so as to set up certain relationships to other texts, people, or Discourses?
15. In terms of identities, activities, and relationships, what Discourses are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant) and in what ways?

Building Politics/Distribution of Social Goods

16. What social goods (e.g., status, power, aspects of gender, race, and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant (and irrelevant) in this situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?
17. How are these social goods connected to the Discourse models and Discourse operative in the situation?

Building Connections

18. What sort of connections—looking forward and/or backward—are made within and across utterances and large stretches of the interaction?
19. What sorts of connections are made to previous or future interactions, to other people, ideas, texts, things, institutions, and Discourses outside the current situation (has to do with intertextuality—Ch. 3)?
20. How is intertextuality (quoting or alluding to other texts) used to create connections among the current situation and other ones or among different Discourses?
21. How do connections of the sort in 18, 19, and 20 help (together with situated meanings and Discourse models) to constitute “coherence”—and what sort of “coherence”—in the situation?

Building Significance for Sign Systems and Knowledge

22. What sign systems are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation (e.g., speech, writing, images, and gestures)? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?
23. What systems of knowledge and ways of knowing are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?
24. What languages in the sense of “national” languages like English, Spanish, etc. are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation?
25. What social languages are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?
26. How is quoting or alluding to other oral or written texts (intertextuality) used to engage with the issues covered in questions 22-25?

Discourse Models

1. What Discourse models are relevant here? What must I, as an analyst, assume that people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact in this way?
2. Are there differences here between the Discourse models that are affecting espoused beliefs and those that are affecting actual actions and practices? What sorts of Discourse models, if any, are being used here to make value judgments about oneself and others?
3. How consistent are the relevant Discourse models here? Are there competing or conflicting Discourse models at play? Whose interests are the Discourse models representing?
4. What other Discourse models are related to the ones most active here? Are there “master models” at work?
5. What sorts of texts, media, experiences, interactions, and/or institutions could have given rise to these Discourse models?
6. How are the relevant Discourse models here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What

Discourses and Conversations are these Discourse models helping to reproduce, transform, or create?

Appendix H

Alicia's Perceptions of the Nature of Reading:

Remembering

I: How does that help (to read it over again)?

A: Cuz if you um if you do it over again, you'll know how to read?

I: How do you think Andrea got good?

A: Maybe her mom, every day when she gets home from school and does her homework, her mom reads a book to her.

I: Oh, her mom reads to her... What does Mrs. P do that helps you most to be a really good reader?

A: Well, the best thing is she when she when we're sitting on the floor she writes down words and she says them to us and then we say the word and that's how we get to know how to read.

I: So, Mrs. P says the word and she writes it and that's how you get to know it...

Is there anything about learning to read that doesn't help very much?

A: Well, if you do it one time it doesn't help you.

I: How many times do you need to read it?

A: Twice. My mommy and daddy read it to me when I get home.

Appendix I

Strugglers' Task Orientation to Instruction

Referring to a worksheet given for seatwork on which the correct word was to be circled in completion of the sentence, I asked Juan, "What are you working on here?"

J: You have to circle it.

T: What do you think Mrs. P wants you to do with this?

J: Circle like this.

T: But how do you know which one to pick?

J: 'Cause it has a red dot. (*Pointed to Mrs. P's correction mark, which identified the correct answer choice*)

Juan not only focuses on the task, but his activity is guided by features of the page that are salient to him—not the print, but the colored marks that Mrs. P has made. When asked about a homework paper, Juan again focused on tasks, that of circling, writing, looking, coding, boxing, underlining, and crossing out:

T: Can you tell me about what you do here?

J: You're upposed to circle it.

T: You circle it? How do you know what to circle?

J: Cuz. This one and this one and this one (pointing to what the teacher has marked in red). And this one and this one's at the middle, this one's at the middle, this one's at the end and this one.

T: How about this one? What did you have to do here?

J: You have to write the letter, you look for the triangles and stars and hearts.

T: And then what does that do when you pick out the shapes? (*A word has been written on the line.*)

J: You have to write the letters.

T: How about over here?

J: You have to code it, box it, code it, underline it, cross it out.

The focus of the worksheet was to have students write words, but Juan has missed this. What stands out to Juan is primarily the activity of the page—circling. He also notes the shapes and writing of letters. Though he has written words on the spaces, he does not notice.

Juan's task focus on activity was not limited to work he completed independently. He also indicated that a task focus occupies his thoughts, at least at times, during instruction in decoding:

T: What was Mrs. P just doing with your class?

J: She was asking us questions, flipping stuff (*reference to flash cards*).

That Mrs. P had asked questions about words and used the questions as a means of helping students learn how to figure them out seemed to be irrelevant to Juan. Likewise, the flipping of the cards was more salient than what was on them—the letter sounds, sight words, marks that show how to decode. This focus on activity is not inconsistent with Juan's ways of describing the objects he brought from home and the ways he participated in class discussions about stories read in class. His use of motion to complete his thoughts and his response to questions by demonstrating with activity, as when Mrs. P asked how the elephant walked and Juan hopped out of his seat and stomped, suggests that Juan privileges activity as a means of participating in literacy learning activities.

Alicia was similarly task-oriented:

T: Can you tell me about your paper?

A: I got to color it, color this black.

T: You have to color—how do you know what colors to color it?

A: (*shrugs*)... You have to do what the teacher tells us.

Alicia's response suggests that her perception of the teacher's directives is oriented toward the task. This does not seem like an unreasonable response from a first grader, and is only really put into perspective when compared with the responses of the succeeders. Julie and Mark also explain their activities in terms of tasks, but this is, without exception, always followed up with a reference that takes the student beyond the task itself to the meaning of the print, as the following examples illustrate:

Example 1:

J: We have to cross out, like what we did on the board with red chalk. Then you have to write the right sentence...because that's the word "sits" and it that's a "z" then it'd be "sitzzzz."

Example 2:

J: When you get the letters that you cut out, you put it on here and spell your name and then you're not done. You, under each letter, you draw a picture of something that begins with that sound...

Example 3:

J: You just cross it out and then we write the words...You don't need to code if you know how to read the words and I know how to read and I don't need to code it.

Example 4:

J: We had to read the directions and circle the word you think it is and then you put it over here. You have to read it “I love” and you see which one makes sense.

Example 5:

J: Well, you have to look up here and the directions are over here, but I don't have to follow them 'cause I already know exactly what to do. And—you have to put em under the right penguin. This is the “a,” it's the “a” that makes the /a/ sound, and this is the “a” that makes the /a/ (*long*) sound. Everything with the /a/ sound goes with this penguin and with the /a/ (*long*) sound it goes with this one.

Example 6:

M: You have to put the pictures in the /a/ or the /a/ (*long*).

Although Mark elaborates less than Julie, he still refers to the sounds as a salient aspect of the sorting activity, rather than coloring, cutting, or gluing, which were also parts of the activity. Strugglers and succeeders find salience in different aspects of the literacy-learning activities that involve decoding.

Appendix J

Post-Study Interviews about Phonics

H: Juan, I'd like to ask you some questions today for Mrs. Brown. You remember Mrs. Brown, right?

J: (Nods)

H: I know you had Saxon Phonics this morning. Is there any part that you remember about Saxon Phonics that you can tell me about?

J: -ed

H: What about -ed?

J: You have to box it.

H: Why do you do that?

J: Because it's a consonant.

H: What else can you tell me about Saxon Phonics?

J: th

H: What about the th?

J: We have to underline it.

H: Why do you do that?

J: Because it's a vowel.

H: Anything else you can tell me about Saxon Phonics?

J: -ow (*They had this today*)

H: What about -ow

J: Sometimes it makes a long sound.

H: I know you go over Saxon Phonics every day with Mrs. P. Do you ever think about it when you read? Does it help you?

J: No.

H: Do you ever use it when you are in here (Title 1)

J: (*Shakes head no*)

H: I know you have Saxon Phonics every day and I'd like to know about that.

Can you tell me about Saxon Phonics?

A: --

H: Can you tell me any of the rules you know?

A: Yeah.

H: Tell me one.

A: I don't know

H: (prompting, wrote "hot" on board). I know you can read this. How would Saxon Phonics help?

A: I don't know.

H: (Mrs. H coded the word hot)

A: Oh yeah.

H: Well, now you have a little bit of an idea of what I'm looking for. Is there anything you can tell me about Saxon Phonics?

A: (*She wrote a symbol that Mrs. H did not recognize.*)

H: Why do you do that?

A: I don't know.

H: When Mrs. P does this, what are you thinking about?

A: I just try to figure out the words.

H: I know you had a Saxon Phonics lesson today. What was it all about?

A: It was ir (*It wasn't—that was last week when she was away*)

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Curriculum Vita

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Education

- 1985 Marywood University; Human Ecology; B.S.
1997 Marywood University; Reading Education; M.S.
2008 Rutgers University; Literacy Education; Ph.D.

Awards

- 2008 Edward Fry Graduate Fellowship

Principal Positions

- 1994-1998 Non-public School; Reading Specialist
1998-2008 Marywood University; Adjunct Instructor
2003-2006 Northern Lehigh School District; Title I Reading Teacher
2006-2008 Centenary College; Assistant Professor of Education
2008-present Marywood University; Assistant Professor; Graduate Reading Program

Presentations

- 2003 "Picturing Words: Denotation Discoveries and Connotation Corrections;" Penna. Association of Developmental Educators (PADE), Altoona, PA
2004 "Picturing Words: Denotation Discoveries and Connotation Corrections;" Keystone State Reading Assoc. (KSRA) Conference, Seven Springs, PA
2007 "Strengthening Outcomes through e-Portfolios;" Making an Impact: Best Practices to Enhance Achievement, Assessment, and Accountability in P-12 Learning Conference, Atlanta, GA

