EARLY READERS' PERCEPTIONS OF "GOOD" READING

AND OF THEMSELVES AS READERS

By

RENEE R. OSTERBYE

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Graduate Program in Elementary/Early Childhood Education

written under the direction of

_____

Dr. Nora Hyland, Chair

_____

Dr. Erica Boling, Committee Member

_____

Dr. Toni K. Rogat, Committee Member

New Brunswick, New Jersey

January, 2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Early Readers' Perceptions of "Good" Reading and of Themselves as Readers

By Renee R. Osterbye

Chair: Nora Hyland, Ph.D.

Reading is key in all aspects of education and improving reading instruction continues to be an issue of national focus. Although there is considerable research on the nature of teaching reading from a variety of viewpoints, little has focused on student perspectives, particularly at younger levels. The purpose of this case study is to describe early readers' perceptions of "good" reading and how they view themselves as readers, in two classrooms with teachers who have slightly different philosophies about reading instruction.

This study focused on two second-grade classes. First, a survey was used to identify two teachers with differing theoretical orientations to reading instruction. Then, six students from each class were selected based on benchmark assessments and other criteria to ensure maximum variation. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to gain an understanding of their reading beliefs and practices, and with the targeted students to shed light on their perceptions about reading and themselves as readers. To help understand the classroom culture and the context for reading instruction, various typical classroom documents were collected and three observations of each class' reading period were conducted. Using a social constructivist framework, the data was analyzed using both deductive codes from relevant literature, as well as inductive codes that arose from patterns in the data. The findings were developed into two separate case studies of each class, which were then compared using cross-case analysis.

The results of this study highlight students' propensity to look to observable factors and use social comparison to evaluate and set goals for themselves as readers, thereby suggesting that the

classroom culture can influence students' perceptions.   In addition to the explicit reading instruction being delivered, students gather more implicit information as they perceive it from the standards and norms in the classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of second-graders in two classrooms. Typically, second grade is an important year as, by the completion of second grade, most students have learned to read with a level of independence. Yet, as early readers, they can reflect on their relatively recent experiences of learning to read and share their perceptions of themselves as successful readers. While the experiences of the students in these two classrooms may seem similar on the surface, there are differences in what the students emphasize as they discuss their views of reading and becoming readers. Through observation and targeted student interviews, this case study looks at this phenomenon.

In 1997, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) assembled the National Reading Panel (NRP) to assess the "status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read" (NICHD, 2000). This panel was comprised of researchers, representatives from colleges of education, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents. They comprehensively reviewed relevant studies in the areas of alphabetics, fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction as these were some areas determined to be critical in teaching children to read. Moreover, the Panel stressed the importance of early experiences with parents, teachers and others that "foster reading development" and early identification and intervention for children identified as "at risk for reading failure" (NICHD, 2000).

As a result, there has been a large focus on evaluating teaching methods and strategies and improving teaching and learning through data-driven, "research-based" program reform

initiatives (Schmoker, 2003; Slavin, 2003) and the outcomes of high-stakes testing on student achievement (Gandal & McGiffert, 2003; Neill, 2003). Additional focus has been on the teachers themselves, ensuring that they are 'highly qualified,' in order to improve students' education (Hampton & Cashman, 2004; Smith, Desimone & Ueno, 2005). Yet, most of this effort involves looking at factors around the students in order to improve student achievement - the teachers, the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and assessment measures. Little research focuses on the students themselves and their points of view regarding their own education (Chapman, Greenfield, & Rinaldi, 2010).

While acknowledging the influence of other factors (e.g. specific teaching methods, curricula, etc.), it is important to recognize that students are key participants in the active process of learning to read. As such, although it may be difficult, gaining their insight may be valuable to improving instruction from another angle. Furthermore, since learning to read is a process that does not occur in isolation, it is also worthy to examine the teaching-learning relationships between teachers and students. Currently, there is a limited amount of research that examines the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions, specifically related to reading. Detailing the thoughts of second-grade readers will enable educators to better understand how these early readers perceive and participate in their own reading instruction, thereby helping the teachers make more informed instructional decisions that can aid in effectively meeting the needs of all students.

The Influence of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on Student Perceptions

Learning to read is a complex process with many variables, and professionals in the field of education continually debate best practices in early reading instruction (Quick, 1998). Much of what forms the basis for a teacher's decisions and actions in the classroom is dependent upon

the curriculum and materials approved of and provided by the district. Yet, one must also examine the impact of teachers' personal theories on their actions in the classroom as supporting or modifying these theories may be a significant part of improving teacher instruction in literacy (Morrison, Wilcox, Madrigal, Roberts, & Hintze, 1999).

In a quantitative study of 66 eight and nine year-olds and 92 parents, Lynch (2002) found relationships between "parents' reading beliefs, children's reader self-perceptions and their reading achievement" (p. 65). One finding was a relationship between fathers' self-efficacy and children's self-perceptions about themselves as readers, particularly with young boys. Interestingly, the results of Lynch's study differed from previous similar research, and she found gender to be a crucial piece. So while further research is needed to investigate the relationship between parents' and children's perceptions, this study also raises the question about another factor that may significantly influence student reading achievement, the teachers. If there can be a strong relationship between parents' and children's beliefs, research also needs to be conducted on the influence of teachers' beliefs and/or practices on students' perceptions, as well.

Yet, researchers are only beginning to study the influence of teachers' personal theoretical beliefs about reading and how these beliefs affect teachers' perceptions and reading instruction in individual classrooms. While there may be a great deal of research on effective practices of reading instruction as measured by standardized tests, it is not often from the classroom teachers' perspective, and even less often from the students' perspective (Chapman, Greenfield, & Rinaldi, 2010). Moreover, little research examines how teachers may be influenced by personal beliefs, based on theoretical approaches, to reading instruction.

Student Perceptions of Reading and of Themselves as Readers

As a teacher researcher, Pierce (1999) raised the disconnect between the ideas she had set out to teach her students as compared to the messages they seemed to be receiving. While she felt that she was providing rich literacy experiences, she was concerned that she continually found that her students favored reading books above their grade-level simply because of a perceived importance. As they investigated metacognition, personal intelligence, and reading, Hall and Myers (1998) similarly found that their subject identified herself as a good reader because of the level of books she was on, although they viewed this example as logical evidence to the child. These results are limited to small samples and further research is necessary to explore the notion that students may be implicitly learning and receiving unintended messages regarding reading from the reading instruction taking place in the classroom.

While student perspectives can shed light on their understanding of the reading process and of themselves as readers, studies have only just begun to examine students' views on this important subject. As students are active participants in the process of learning to read and becoming independent readers, it is imperative that their views on this process are considered. While it may be difficult to ascertain the thoughts of these young learners for a variety of reasons, it is possible to gain some insight that may help influence reading instruction (Hanke, 2014). For example, primarily through the use of drawings and discussion, Hanke (2014) was able to discover young children's views on their guided reading lessons in two English schools. In addition, in a longitudinal case study, Bergeron and Bradbury-Wolff (2010) developed and utilized a "Strategy Perception Interview" to help identify students' perceptions of their own strategy use. When combined with other data analysis, they gained a deeper understanding of how students perceive and apply the reading strategies they learn.

This is a critical perspective for educators to be aware of as children's perceptions of themselves as readers influence their achievement in this area (Chapman & Tunmer, 2003; Hanke, 2014; Levy, 2009; Lynch, 2002). In a review of various studies, including their own three-year longitudinal study, Chapman and Tunmer (2003) explored the notion that reading self-concept may develop before academic self-concept and typically begins when a child is between six and seven years-old. They defined self-concept as "the perceptions, knowledge, views, and beliefs that individuals hold about themselves as learners" (p. 7). Reading self-concept refers to those perceptions held with respect specifically to reading, while academic self-concept considers those views and beliefs in a more general, school achievement sense. If it is true that reading self-concept may develop first, then this may be an area of critical focus to improve academic self-concept, and thereby overall school success. Hence, Chapman and Tunmer set the groundwork for further research focusing on students who are just learning to read to improve the development of successful readers, and students, in general.

Moreover, students' self-perceptions as readers affect their reading behaviors in the classroom (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Knapp, 2002). While Christian and Bloome (2004) mainly focused on English Language Learners in their in-depth qualitative study of one first-grade peer-group reading activity, the larger concept was the way in which students identify themselves, and how others perceive them, based on their reading abilities. The socially constructed nature of reading can contribute to a student's identity within a classroom and can enhance or limit what students gain from classroom activities. In her case studies of two second-graders, Knapp (2002) investigated the views of two boys considered to be at-risk in reading due to their inability or unwillingness to engage in reading. Similarly, she concluded that children's perceptions of reading significantly affect their participation in literacy activities and the degree

of success they experience with reading. To add on, one implication that resulted from a mixed-methods study among 20 fourth-grade academically struggling students was that the presence of a social piece may be a critical factor in students' motivation in reading and writing (Mason, Meadan, Hedin, & Cramer, 2012). Hence, the students' beliefs constitute an important component to consider and study to help increase student engagement in classroom reading activities, thereby increasing their reading achievement.

While a limited number of studies have examined the links between students' self-perceptions, their reading behaviors in the classroom, and their academic success as a whole, additional research is clearly necessary in this area (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Hall & Myers, 1998; Henk & Melnick, 1998; Knapp, 2002; Pierce, 1999). Furthermore, the possible relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions about reading requires investigation.

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

Reading is a key component in all aspects of education and improving reading instruction continues to be an issue of national focus. Particularly in early education, there is a wide-ranging body of research on the nature of teaching reading that has sparked additional research, discussion, and critique. Much of the commentary has been dedicated to evaluating teaching methods and strategies and improving teaching and learning through data-driven, research-based program reform initiatives (Schmoker, 2003; Slavin, 2003). Others have directed their efforts to the adequate yearly progress portion of *NCLB* (Buckendahl, Huynh, Siskind & Saunders, 2005; Porter, Linn & Trimble, 2005) and the outcomes of high-stakes testing on student achievement (Gandal & McGiffert, 2003; Neill, 2003). Still others have focused on the goal of providing students with "highly qualified" teachers in order to improve students' education (Hampton &

Cashman, 2004; Smith, Desimone & Ueno, 2005). Yet, little research has focused on the students themselves and their points of view regarding their own education (Chapman, Greenfield, & Rinaldi, 2010). In addition, to looking at factors around the students in order to improve student achievement - the teachers, the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and assessment measures, students' perceptions should be considered. Perhaps by better understanding this essential perspective, we can improve student learning from a different angle.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines reading using a social constructivist framework as this context illuminates key concepts. Social constructivism emphasizes "the importance of culture and context" in the comprehension of society (Kim, 2001). In other words, the meaning of events, text, actions, etc. is created through human action and interaction amongst themselves and with their environment. Furthermore, this perspective asserts that all knowledge is socially constructed based on the meanings people make about the world around them, which is influenced by their experiences. Notable proponents of this concept include Vygotsky and Bruner (Kim, 2001).

Undoubtedly, the human use of language is social in nature as it is spoken, written, listened to, and read in order to express and gain meaning through communication (Strickland, Galda & Cullinan, 2004). Moreover, learning to read is not something that occurs spontaneously, but rather is taught through information that is socially exchanged through a long series of developmental experiences. That teaching can come from a variety of sources including parents, other children, relatives, school teachers, videos, and television (Strickland et al., 2004).

Hence, learning to read is an interactive social process that requires the reader to engage with a text in order to extrapolate meaning from it. People must be actively connected with the text as they apply strategies to decode and comprehend it. Bloome & Katz (1997) view this as a social relationship between the author and the reader. In addition, they assert that a second social relationship is created among the people or characters about which the text is written, and the reader may assume different identities based on their perspective of the author or the characters (Bloome & Katz, 1997). Moreover, the readers' comprehension of the text is based on their prior knowledge and the meaning they create based on social experiences they have had (Strickland et al., 2004).

Furthermore, an individual's experiences help shape his or her beliefs and identity within a setting. In today's classroom communities, the social experiences children have with teachers and classmates can clearly influence how students view themselves within the group. For example, children who are encouraged and valued as readers within a safe, nurturing classroom environment tend to learn, grow, and respond as such (Strickland et al., 2004). On the other hand, students who have negative associations with themselves as learners and their classroom situations tend to take fewer academic risks for fear of being ridiculed (Strickland et al., 2004). Gee's (1990) theory of social discourse considers how discourse, or communication, contributes to one's social status or identity within a setting. He argues that discourse "integrates words, actions, interactions, values, feelings, attitudes, and thinking in specific and distinctive ways" (p. xvii). Thus, a student's identity and, in time, his or her academic success can be furthered or hindered due, in part, to the socially constructed nature of the classroom environment and community. For example, if a student is viewed as a successful reader by his classmates, that child may receive praise and accolades that could help shape his identity within the classroom

environment. He may become a leader within the classroom and be looked up to by peers, thereby gaining confidence in his own abilities.   On the other hand, if a child struggles and is perceived as not being good at academic tasks, this could shape that child's interactions with others within the classroom. For instance, a child recognized as a poor reader may not be sought out as a partner for literacy activities or be made fun for making mistakes. This type of thinking could negatively shape a student's identity and decrease his motivation or effort. In both cases, the social discourse can help shape the student's identity and become a contributing factor in his academic success overall.

Finally, the entire notion of what is "good" is a judgment that is socially constructed. People learn and decide what is considered good based on their social experiences with the people and immediate environment that surrounds them. What is considered appropriate in one situation is not necessarily deemed so in another, depending on the context of the experience (Gee, 1990). What constitutes good reading by a particular group of people in one setting may be entirely different when judged by others.

Hence, this study approaches reading from a social constructivist framework in order to illuminate key concepts. Social constructivism emphasizes that concept that meaning is created through human actions and interactions amongst themselves and within their environment. Typically, learning to read involves information that is socially exchanged through a series of experiences (Strickland et al., 2004). The reader must interact with text in order to extrapolate meaning from it. Furthermore, one's prior knowledge and experiences play a role in how a person approaches a text and interacts with it. Moreover, Gee's (1990) theory of social discourse adds a layer of complexity to the nature of reading instruction and learning within the classroom. Discourse includes "words, actions, interaction, values, feelings, attitudes, and thinking in

specific and distinctive ways" (p. xvii) and can contribute to a student's social identity within a classroom environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the current literature on early reading instruction by providing students with an opportunity to share their perceptions of what reading is and how they view themselves as readers. Using a social constructivist framework presumes that reading is a social interaction in which students actively engage and make meaning based on both human interactions and from the text. Therefore, the students' perceptions may provide insight into the depth of the knowledge they are constructing as they participate within their classroom community.   Since available research on beginning reading instruction is weak from the students' perspective, it is the hope that this additional information can contribute to improving current pedagogy.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Given two teachers with different theoretical orientations, yet the same practical approach to reading instruction, what do second grade students think is "good" reading and how do they view themselves as readers?

2. What is the relationship, if any, between teachers' beliefs and practices and students' understanding of reading?

3. Given the two teachers' different beliefs about reading, how do students respond differentially in these contexts?

Significance of the Study

There are gaps in understanding teachers' and students' beliefs about reading, and the relationship, if any, between the two perspectives. While various studies have been qualitative in nature, this has limited the research to small sample sizes, often case studies of a few individuals. This study is significant as it adds depth and description to the body of literature on reading instruction to inform classroom instruction. Moreover, few studies have focused on children's perceptions, although they are key participants in the active process of learning to read. While it may be more difficult and time-consuming to gain their insights, additional interview study is necessary to add to this important component of reading instruction. Finally, there is a limited amount of research that examines the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions, specifically related to reading. In particular, by investigating and recounting the perspectives of both teachers and students, this helps fill the gap between these two important groups of participants. Detailing the thoughts of second-grade readers will hopefully enable educators to better understand the unique experiences of these children and how they perceive and participate in their own reading instruction, thereby helping the teachers make more informed, meaningful instructional decisions to more effectively meet the needs of all students.

Limitations

Improving reading instruction continues to be an issue of national focus. This study seeks to improve early reading instruction by adding students' perceptions to the current body of knowledge. Although students must actively engage in their learning to become successful readers, their perceptions of reading and of themselves as readers have largely been overlooked. Through a case study design that includes observation and targeted student interviews, this study seeks to help change that.

Clearly, there are limitations to this case study. This research was bounded by its setting, participants, and research timeframe. It was set in one school, at one particular grade level, second grade. While a purposeful sample was selected in order to maximize variation, the number of participants was limited to two teachers and 12 students. Moreover, the data was collected over a limited time period of approximately four weeks. As Stake (1995) points out, case studies are typically not large or strong enough to make broad generalizations to other settings or populations. However, people can learn "much that is general from single cases" (p. 85) and add to their prior knowledge and learn from receiving such generalizations and from personal experience.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

The following definitions were used in conducting this research:

1. Student perceptions – students' views on a topic or situation based on information they have gained through observation and/or experience;

2. Self-concept – a mental image one has of oneself;

3. Reading self-concept – a mental image one has of oneself specifically as a reader;

4. Self-efficacy – a belief in one's abilities to accomplish a specific task;

5. "Good" reading – will be defined based on the participants' notions of "good" reading as explained through their words.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Chapter One presented an introduction to the study which began with the importance of early reading instruction and some of the components of this complex process (Quick, 1998). While various studies have explored ways to improve reading instruction from areas such as curriculum, teacher training and qualifications, methodologies, and assessments, few have delved

into the views of the students' themselves. Hence, this study explores students' perceptions of good reading and of themselves as readers. Moreover, it investigates the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and students' understanding of reading.

Next, Chapter Two will present a review of relevant literature that informs this study. These areas include teacher beliefs and practical approaches, student perceptions of good reading and of themselves as readers, and the influence of teacher instruction on student perceptions. Chapter Three will lay out the methodology used to conduct this study including research design, the setting, and the role of the researcher. Moreover, Chapter Three will discuss procedures utilized in participant selection, data collection from various sources, and data management and analysis. Afterward, the findings and results of data analysis will be presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five will serve to summarize and discuss results and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three key areas inform this study. First, because teachers make and implement decisions in their classrooms, this review of the literature will explore how teachers' beliefs influence their reading instruction and how those beliefs compare to the practical approaches teachers use in the classroom. Second, because the perspective of students as active participants in their learning is important, this review looks at the research describing student perceptions, particularly with respect to their understanding of reading. Moreover, this section will also review research describing students' self-perceptions: self-concept and self-efficacy. Third, in this review, I will consider how students' perceptions of reading may be influenced by the instruction they receive.

I conducted a comprehensive search to gather and review the relevant literature. Primarily, I searched the journals, indexes, and major Education databases associated with the Rutgers University Libraries system to locate scholarly peer-reviewed articles electronically. As this literature review essentially consists of three major areas, I generally conducted three broad searches inclusive of these topics. To begin each search, I entered appropriate search terms as key words. For example, when searching about teachers' beliefs and practical approaches, I used the terms "teacher" and "beliefs" as search terms. Since this study focused on early readers, I also used Boolean operators to include terms such as "early readers," "reading," "primary," and "elementary" when working within the "advanced search" section to better target appropriate articles. To further refine my results, I focused on the most recent publication dates and tried to limit the results to approximately the past ten years, however, I did broaden the date range when the results were limited. Furthermore, when appropriate, I sought out other articles based on my results; be it other articles by the same author, related articles in a specific journal, or from the

citation list of a relevant article.   This step-by-step process was repeated for each of the three

areas that inform this study. Overall, this review discovered a lack of studies that link reading

instruction and student perceptions, particularly with respect to transitional and early fluent

readers. Moreover, the influence of teachers' reading instruction on student perceptions warrants

further research.

Teachers' Beliefs and Practical Approaches

Over time, shifts in policy and practice, both formal and informal, affect teachers'

curricular materials and instructional practices in different ways (Allington, 2000; Coburn, 2001;

Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Even when a policy is mandated, individual teacher

implementation varies tremendously and little research has been conducted on the degree of

effectiveness of actual policy execution in the schools (Allington, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Valencia

et al., 2006; Wixson & Yochum, 2004).

Allington (2001) examined various large-scale studies that explored the effects of reading

policy on classroom instruction and student achievement. These studies included: the Rand

Change Agent Study, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education studies, the Michigan

Educational Policy and Practice studies, the Texas basal adoption studies, the Policy Analysis for

California (PACE) studies, the Center for Literature Teaching and Learning (CLTL) studies, the

Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA) studies, among smaller scale studies. Each of these

studies focused on the effects of policy on instruction. Interestingly, Allington noted that while

the influence of policy on classroom instruction is often looked at, the actual effect of changes on

student achievement is more often left to the wayside. He concluded that, even with major

district-wide or school-wide reform efforts, there may actually be little change to the core

instruction taking place in the classroom (Allington, 2000). It has been suggested that this is due

to personal teacher pedagogy regarding beginning reading instruction, meaning that teachers are more likely to teach in the manner they personally believe to be best, despite policies or mandates. From his review of these large scale studies, Allington determined that it is the nature of teachers to continue to use methods with which they are most comfortable and those which they believe best meet the needs of their students.

When Coburn (2001) examined the relationship between policy messages and teacher practice, she conducted an in-depth, year-long case study of the teachers' professional community in one urban California elementary school. As a result, she found support for the notion that teachers "interpret, adapt, and even transform policies as they put them into place" (p. 145). In addition, she found that teachers' interpretations and reactions to policy are shaped by collective sensemaking and the formal and informal networks and alliances of teachers. These interactions and conversations play a significant role in how policy and other environmental messages are interpreted by teachers and influences what the results may or may not look like in classroom instruction. Hence, even with policy mandates in place, how they are interpreted and enacted in the classroom can be influenced by the collective thinking of formal and informal groups of teachers.

Research has described how teachers' perceptions are developed through a variety of means including personal experience, pedagogical knowledge, or through the use of specific curricular materials (Deal & White, 2006; Morrison et al., 1999; Richards, 2001; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997). In a longitudinal case study, Deal and White (2006) closely followed two preservice teachers from the fall of their senior year in college through their first year of professional teaching to see how their literacy beliefs and practices developed and changed over time. The two participants had similar family and socioeconomic backgrounds and taught at the

same school, one in second grade and the other in third. Through interviews, observations,

participant reflections, and artifacts, Deal and White found that these two new teachers indicated

that their beliefs about literacy were influenced mostly by school context and their teacher

preparation. However, an additional theme that came through the data indicated personal history

factors such as "reflection, self-efficacy, family input, and teacher models" (p. 317) as being

important influences as well.

Similarly, Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd (1997) found evidence that shows how teachers'

philosophies about literacy instruction appear to be rooted most strongly in their personal

experiences, rather than in professional development, research, or policy. In their case study,

they focused on two kindergarten teachers with different views of early reading instruction, one

more traditional and skills-based while the other was identified as more of a whole language

teacher. Through their research, Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd determined that the education the

teachers' had received as they learned to read were the impetus for what they sought in their

teacher preparation programs. They looked for courses that matched or fulfilled their early

beliefs of effective literacy instruction. Hence, this adds support to the notion that mandated

policy, coupled with assigned curricular materials, is not enough to change actual reading

instruction in the classroom. Unless the individual teachers' beliefs are similar to those implied

by the educational changes, the difference in the teachers' pedagogy must be addressed and, if

necessary, modified if real change is to be enacted.

Existing research has illustrated the impact and importance of teacher beliefs in enacting

change and policy implementation in the classroom (Allington, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Fullan,

2002; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). However, even with large-scale change and new curricular

materials, there may be little change in actual teaching practice, other than on the surface

(Allington, 2000). Yet, a longitudinal study of four beginning elementary school teachers, by Valencia et al. (2006) demonstrated why that may not be a negative result. They found that curricular materials did not, independently, shape teacher instruction, but did impact teachers' thoughtfulness and ability to be flexible and responsive to students' needs. In particular, they found that the two teachers "who were most able to adapt instruction were those least tied to specific curriculum materials" (p. 115). Effective instruction is more complex than some mandates may imply; teachers' daily decision-making plays a large role and, therefore, makes their theoretical beliefs an important aspect to consider.

Thus, the following key points about teachers' beliefs and practical approaches are gleaned from the literature:

- Teachers' beliefs are developed in numerous ways, but personal experience may have the greatest impact (Deal & White, 2006; Morrison et al., 1999; Richards, 2001; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997).

- There is inconsistent evidence regarding the congruity of teachers' beliefs and their actual practice (Deal & White, 2006; Richards, 2001).

- Even with mandates and policy changes, there may be little change to the actual instruction in the classroom (Allington, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Fullan, 2002; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).

In summary, while teachers' beliefs are developed in numerous ways including personal experience, pedagogical knowledge, or through the use of specific curricular materials (Deal & White, 2006; Morrison et al., 1999; Richards, 2001; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997), personal experience may have the greatest impact on those beliefs (Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997). However, some teachers' beliefs are not well-formed or representative of deeply-entrenched

values. Studies have found inconsistent evidence of teachers' theoretical beliefs in the actual

literacy instruction taking place in the classroom (Deal & White, 2006; Richards, 2001). While

Deal and White (2006) found the teachers' classroom practices to be congruous with their

expressed beliefs regarding early literacy instruction, Richards (2001) found that many of the 24

elementary and secondary teachers in her exploratory study had difficulty even articulating their

theoretical beliefs.

Student Perceptions

Clearly, teachers play an important role in the learning that takes place in the classroom.

It seems that much of the research on reading instruction has focused on teachers' classroom

instruction, their curricular materials and programs, and the results of high-stakes testing and

assessment. Another critical perspective to consider is that of the students; therefore, this section

reviews literature that examines students' understanding of reading as well as their perceptions

of themselves as readers. Particularly, in the area of self-perceptions, this review examines the

notions of self-concept and self-efficacy, their similarities and distinctions, and why they are

important to early reading instruction.

Good reading. Research indicates that while students must possess specific techniques

and skills to be a competent reader, there is an interconnectedness of reading well and loving to

read. Gates (2002) pointed out that one without the other will not produce a successful reader,

that both components are necessary. Similarly, Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons and Fountas (2005)

assert that good readers are engaged readers who think as they read. Successful readers think

"within the text" to comprehend, follow stories, and learn from what they are reading. They also

think "beyond the text" as they connect with prior knowledge and personal experience to draw

additional meaning from the text. Finally, good readers think "about the text" and can identify

structural elements such as organization and can navigate within those structures to uncover

information and appreciate the written language (Scharer et al., 2005).

Hence, good reading is the ability to read well, with respect to both decoding and

comprehending. Good reading is an active process as readers engage with text. Readers apply

schema and background knowledge as they seek to make sense of text. There is an intent to gain

meaning through the application of strategies to decode and figure out words, as well as to

comprehend and understand the message the text relays (Gates, 2002; Scharer et al., 2005).

In their effort to document young children's perceptions of reading strategies, Bergeron

& Bradbury-Wolff (2010) conducted a three-year longitudinal study with a group of students

beginning in first grade. Through interviews and data analysis, they found the three most

common responses students articulated were rereading, decoding, and asking for help.

Furthermore, when stuck on a word, most children indicated they would use phonics to sound it

out, an emphasis also found by Reutzel & Sabey (1996). Furthermore, these three common

response themes were consistent over time, although there was an increased level of

sophistication in students' responses (Bergeron & Bradbury-Wolff, 2010).

Yet, in general, students seem to overemphasize the public, fluency aspect of reading,

meaning that they focus on the aspect of reading that is often observable to others (Henk &

Melnick, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Tancock, 1997). For example, students notice classmates that

read the words correctly aloud, rather than considering other components of reading such as

decoding strategies and comprehension which tend to take place more internally. Henk and

Melnick (1998) found this result when they interviewed 56 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students

about the components of good readers. However, Johnson (2005) found evidence of an increased

awareness and articulation of comprehension strategies over time as a teacher researcher working with one class of fourth graders.

   Self-perceptions as readers. Also relevant are the studies that found social comparison among students and the children's frequent identification of themselves as readers based on their reading levels (Hall & Myers, 1998; Pierce, 1999). Hall and Myers (1998) interviewed a nine year-old-girl who identified herself as a good reader because she was on the "black books which is very high" and showed how she compared herself to others in the class based on this. Pierce's (1999) action research study with her multi-grade class showed that students had similar perceptions of themselves as readers and favored reading books above their grade-level simply because of this perceived importance. Although these studies were small and limited, this student practice may be an unintended part of early literacy instruction and needs further research.

   In addition, while there is a large quantity of research delving into students' self-perceptions and academic motivation, there is also a great deal of overlap and confusion regarding the terms self-concept and self-efficacy. Although undoubtedly related, these terms are not interchangeable and have distinctions (Bong & Clark, 1999; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 1996).

   The term "self-concept" refers to a more generalized belief someone has about oneself, such as "I'm a good reader" or "I'm good at math" (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). More specifically, self-concept is a cognitive judgment of general ability combined with emotional feelings of self-worth (Bong & Clark, 1999; Pajares, 1996). The cognitive aspect includes an awareness of one's self and traits and tends to be descriptive and evaluative in nature. In addition, it also includes an affective component that deals with feelings of self-worth, an

approval or disapproval of self after comparing one's ability to a standard or norm (Bong &

Clark, 1999).

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is more situation-specific and includes a person's

cognitive judgment as to whether he can accomplish a task based on particular mastery criteria

(Bong & Clark, 1999; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). An example of a self-efficacy belief might

be, "I know I can solve two-digit subtraction problems that involve regrouping."   It focuses on

task-specific "performance expectations" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 84). Interestingly, when a

person lacks experience with a task, self-efficacy beliefs tend to include more social comparison.

This is evident when watching others do something first to predict how oneself will do, and to

learn from the actions and results of others' efforts (Bong & Clark, 1999).

Noteworthy, however, is that research indicates that there are developmental changes in

how students think about their own abilities over time (Bong & Clark, 1999; Dweck, 2002).

Children's self-concept can become more differentiated as they grow older and they tend to

become more domain-specific. Dweck (2002) described differences in students' thinking around

kindergarten, ages 7-8, and 10-12. In kindergarten years, young students use social comparison

to evaluate their own abilities and are focused on good versus bad. While they have observable

reactions to failure, they tend to be resistant and bounce back. Bong & Clark (1999) describe

similar findings with children under the age of eight. Hence, successful mastery of a goal may

be more influential than social comparison information with children of this age. Students gain

information to evaluate themselves by looking to their peers, but ultimately focus on good or bad

performance, or success or failure with a task to evaluate themselves. Hence, self-concept and

self-efficacy may truly be more indistinguishable with children in this age group.

Dweck (2002) described a transition in students' thinking, however, between the ages of seven and eight. Earlier, when they were younger, students' perceptions of their abilities were connected to observable things they knew they can do, but their thinking starts to shift to consider more internal, less observable factors that seem to focus on social norms. Furthermore, their self-evaluations tend to increase in accuracy, thereby becoming less positive in nature. Yet, studies of these children show the perception that effort is still important to ability as children identify those who work harder as smarter (p. 74). This thinking shifts again, as by the ages of 10-12 failure is more upsetting to students, and they start to view their abilities as more of fixed traits rather than impacted by effort.

While self-concept and self-efficacy are both important to consider when thinking about student self-perceptions, Bong & Clark (1999) asserted from their review of academic motivation literature that self-concept studies have revealed inconsistent connections and/or influence on academic achievement, while self-efficacy seems to be more directly tied with students' academic performance and task-persistence (p. 139-140). Similarly, Linnenbrink & Pintrich (2003) found self-efficacy to be more predictive of engagement and learning than self-concept in their review of relevant literature. Moreover, the higher students' self-efficacy beliefs, the more confidence they may have in taking on academic challenges, persisting on a task, and, ultimately, the higher chance they have for being successful compared to those with lower self-efficacy beliefs who may be less likely to engage in a task or give up more easily in the face of a challenge, thereby limiting their learning and academic success (Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000).

Therefore, successful early readers are going to demonstrate a positive self-concept and self-efficacy when it comes to their views of themselves as readers. While they may still be

limited and not be able to articulate these notions clearly through words, it would be reasonable to expect them to show an understanding of the active, participatory nature of successful reading. Successful readers are going to share ideas that shed light on a growing awareness of reading as a process of both decoding written words and understanding meaning from the text. Moreover, good readers are problem-solvers who have, and are able to apply, more than one strategy to surmount reading challenges. As they gain such experience, their self-efficacy with similar tasks should improve as well. A good reader will not only "sound out" or "ask for help" from others, although these are both valuable strategies in a good reader's "toolbox." They will have a variety of strategies at their disposal to effectively persist with the appropriate reading tasks set before them.

Thus, the following key points about student perceptions are gleaned from the literature:

- Students seem to overemphasize the public, fluency aspect of reading, meaning that they focus on the aspect of reading that is often observable to others (Henk & Melnick, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Tancock, 1997).

- Students use social comparison in creating their self-perceptions, and frequently identify themselves as readers based on their reading levels (Hall & Myers, 1998; Pierce, 1999).

- Self-concept and self-efficacy may be related to students' self-perceptions and motivation (Bong & Clark, 1999; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 1996), but more investigation is necessary about that relationship. In addition, there are developmental changes in how students think about their own abilities over time (Bong & Clark, 1999; Dweck, 2002).

Hence, while self-concept and self-efficacy may be intertwined, particularly with younger students, it is important to try to distinguish between the two to help operationalize and study their effects on students' perceptions and learning. Self-concept is much more general in nature and refers to one's overall view of oneself. It can be domain-specific and can include feelings of self-worth. On the other hand, while it may be connected to self-concept, self-efficacy is more specific and performance-oriented, related to one's ability to successfully accomplish a particular task (Dweck, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000).

Influence of Instruction on Students' Perceptions

Some people view learning to read as a highly individualized act, while others see the process more as a part of a socially constructed way of making meaning of text. By examining this issue as a social one, the role of the teacher in shaping children's perceptions becomes more important. According to Turner (1995), literacy consists of holistic activities and, as a principal theorist of social constructivism, Vygotsky stressed the importance of a learner being involved and "engaged in the whole activity, rather than a discrete part" (p. 410). While there is an abundance of studies on student's perceptions and reading instruction, separately, there are not nearly as many that link the two areas. This section will examine the limited research in this area.

Learning to read is a complex process which children approach and navigate differently (Smith & Smith, 1994; Stahl, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). As they go through school, students may be exposed to different theories of reading education based on teachers' and administrators' pedagogy, experiences, and beliefs. However, the results of research investigating the influence of teachers' theoretical beliefs have been inconsistent and require closer examination. Some research has shown children's understanding of reading and literacy

to be reflective of their teachers' beliefs, thereby illustrating the importance of recognizing and understanding teachers' beliefs, their origin, and how they are created or changed (Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997).

Most of America's literacy instruction can be placed on a continuum with "skill-based" instruction on one end all the way to more "wholistic" approach on the other. Skill-based instruction typically specifies particular skills that need to be acquired and mastered before they can successfully be applied. Often, a basal reading program is an example of a skills-based approach and includes a scope and sequence of skills to be presented and mastered. In contrast, a more wholistic approach, such as "whole language" instruction focuses on going from the whole to the part, meaning that children would use and understand the purpose of language before learning different parts of it. Students are encouraged to focus on overall meaning, use multiple strategies simultaneously, and learn skills in context (Turner, 1995, p. 413).

Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd (1997) focused on two kindergarten teachers' differing beliefs regarding reading instruction in their case study. While one teacher used more of a whole language approach, the other was more traditional and favored a skills-based approach. What they found was that, overall, students' mirrored their teachers' beliefs as the skills-based students tended to see reading and writing as containing numerous pieces, or skills, to be mastered while the whole language classroom students tended to participate in the process of reading and writing with whatever knowledge they had. Hence, it is critical that classroom teachers examine, recognize and reflect on their own beliefs, understanding the impact they have on the students.

Another study sheds light on the need for additional research to investigate the level of influence of teachers' approaches to instruction on students' perceptions. From a small exploratory interview study with 36 first-graders, Reutzel and Sabey (1996) found that while

teachers' orientations may have influenced students' views of reading and of themselves as

readers, it did not affect the students' use of various reading strategies. For example, the

students in classrooms identified as having a teacher with a whole language theoretical

orientation believed the purpose of learning to read was to read books and viewed this as the way

to reading success. Thus, the students' overall views of reading were analogous with the

teachers' in this respect. However, with respect to the use of reading strategies, students' views

were not necessarily analogous with the teachers' beliefs. In addition, all the students thought of

themselves as good readers in general; however, their responses as to why they believed they

were good readers were different depending on the identified theoretical orientation of the

teacher in their classroom. Ultimately, however, "classroom context influences students'

developing conceptions of literacy and their willingness to engage in literacy behaviors" (Turner,

1995, p. 410) and, therefore, is critical to their literacy success and achievement. Hence, as

leaders of the classroom, teachers help establish the classroom context, and this role warrants

further investigation as to its influence on students.

Various studies focused on the social nature of reading and how students identify

themselves based on their reading abilities or challenges in the classroom. Christian and Bloome

(2004) discussed the notion of "symbolic capital" or the idea of a "privileged social status" that a

student may enjoy as a result of social interactions within the classroom (p. 367). While

focusing mainly on English Language Learners, Christian and Bloome described and analyzed

the social dynamics within a first-grade reading activity. They stated that this "social

construction of identities" can be "ratified or contested" within typical classroom activities,

including reading (p. 373). Other studies confirm the social nature of self-perceptions with

respect to reading (Hall & Myers, 1998; Jinks & Lorsbach, 2003; Knapp, 2002; Landis, 2003),

thereby creating possible connections between student and teacher perceptions as teachers contribute greatly to the social environment of the classroom.

The social aspect of motivation is supported by Nolen's (2007) work in which she also examined students' motivation to read and write by observing and interviewing both teachers and students. Nolen realized that the meaning of reading, writing, and literacy in general was socially co-constructed by teacher and student. Literacy can be highly valued and connected to a classroom community as something to be mastered or an area in which to display competency. The social context of the situations in a classroom can contribute to its meaning and value, thereby influencing student understanding and value of an idea. For example, if reading is something that needs to be completed in a given time frame, slower readers may be viewed more negatively or given help just to get through a task. This could lead to a lower self-efficacy notion that could limit student engagement. On the other hand, if the purpose of the reading is seen as valuable and students are given more autonomy in helping each other and themselves through coaching strategies, this could possibly help create higher feelings of self-efficacy and student engagement.

A study of students' perspectives on guided reading as a classroom practice (Hanke, 2014) illustrates the sensitivity of students to social and cultural contexts within the classroom learning activities. Through drawings and discussion, the young children in this study (ages four to seven) showed that the guided reading experience taught them how to behave and interact (e.g. how to hold a book and how to behave within that small group setting). In addition, they demonstrated an awareness of the teacher's time constraints and thought it was desirable to read fast. Moreover, they also recognized that members of the guided reading group could contribute

to their learning by helping each other. Hence, these notions represent the socially-constructed learning that may take place separate from the teacher's direct instruction.

Moreover, motivation itself can be socially constructed and can be different for different individuals in varied conditions (Ames, 1992; Nolen, 2007). When Ames (1992) studied student perceptions and how they are formed, she explained that children can have different experiences, even within the same classroom, that affect their perceptions. This is in addition to the varied life experiences they bring with them to the classroom. Therefore it is important to investigate how the "student perceives and gives meaning to classroom experiences" (p. 267-268).

As previously discussed, numerous motivational studies have looked at the characteristics of self-concept, self-efficacy, and their possible influence on academic motivation and student motivation (Bong & Clark, 1999; Dweck, 2002; Linnenbrink, & Pintrich, 2003; Nolen, 2007; Pajares, 1996; Turner, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Also, as distinguished earlier, self-concept refers to a more generalized belief someone has about oneself, and is a cognitive judgment of ability combined with feelings of self-worth (Bong & Clark, 1999; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 1996). While not as consistent a predictor for academic motivation as self-efficacy, which is more specific and related to a particular task, the two may be more intertwined and connected within young children (Bong & Clark, 1999; Dweck, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000). These factors need to be considered when looking at reading instruction in the classroom.

Studies have connected high self-efficacy beliefs with more cognitive engagement, task persistence, and general academic success (Ames, 1992; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). In their literature review, Chapman and Tunmer (2003) explored the notion that reading self-concept actually develops prior to overall academic self-concept and typically

begins when a child is between six and seven years-old. In addition, they discussed a strong

predictive association between word identification strategies and children's reading self-efficacy.

This led to an important conclusion that reading remediation that fails to focus on word-level

cues and strategies can actually make children's reading difficulties worse. Hence, reading

instruction that does not focus on these cues and strategies could potentially worsen a child's

reading difficulties, thereby impacting students' reading self-concept and self-efficacy leading to

less cognitive engagement and less learning as a whole.

Next, the types of tasks and how they are carried out in the classroom can have an

influence on student perceptions. Ames (1992) found that social comparison is a huge part of

judging one's own abilities, has more variables, and tends to be more negative when compared to

students who focus on mastery goals. She described how Brophy's (1983) work found that many

children become focused on tasks with a "performance orientation" rather than a "product

orientation," due to the high visibility of their work (as in Ames, 1992, p. 264). Typical

classrooms start with much of the work as product oriented, but children shift from concentrating

on the task to the more observable performance factors that include information like the quantity

of work, absence of errors, and other information based on classroom norms. Hence, while

classroom instruction might appear to be product-oriented and expect students to engage in tasks

with which they can be successful based on mastery of specific criteria, they may still be making

social comparisons that shift their perception of the task to one that is more performance

oriented.

Turner (1995) found the strongest predictor of motivation as described as strategy use,

attention, and persistence was the literacy task itself. Her work studied children's motivation

for literacy in six first-grade basal classrooms and six whole language classrooms. Similarly,

Mason et al. (2012) identified four factors that lead to success and motivation as interest, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and perceptions of the tasks themselves.

In Turner's (1995) work, in both basal and whole language classrooms, tasks were classified as "open" or "closed." Open tasks gave students more ownership in problem-solving and decision-making. For example, students selected books to read and how they were to be read (independently or in partners) or chose what to write about. Conversely, closed tasks were those with specific directions (either from the teacher or the task itself) and structured steps to come to an expected outcome. Students had little choice and were expected to apply specific skills to produce a desired outcome. She found that open tasks led to higher student engagement (Turner, 1995) and this was reinforced in the work by Perry, VandeKamp, Mercer, & Nordby (2002) that studied self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to "academically effective forms of learning that involve metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action" (Perry et al., 2002, p. 5). They found higher SRL in classes where there were complex, open-ended activities and student choice that impacts learning.

Moreover, increased motivation can come from tasks that present a moderate amount of difficulty resulting in enhanced confidence and increased interest. In reading, the appropriate difficulty level of text may allow students to become more fully engaged with the text as they successfully draw upon and apply reading strategies (Bergeron & Bradbury-Wolff, 2010). Tasks that are too hard lead to frustration, while those that are too easy bore the students (Turner, 1995). When students are able to control the level of the challenge through their choices, there is more SRL, and high SRL classrooms can "challenge students without challenging their self-efficacy" (Perry et al., 2002, p. 12).

Finally, social guidance and cooperative learning can also serve as an aspect of motivation, thereby increasing cognitive engagement. Turner (1995) found students would make comments to each other, model skills, and that this cooperative work led to more engagement by more students. Perry et al. (2002) similarly described high SRL classes as giving students an opportunity to evaluate themselves and offer feedback to others. Furthermore, high SRL classrooms not only give students a chance to learn from one another, it is done in combination with teacher scaffolding and support through correcting and modeling. This helps present the message that errors are an opportunity to learn and leads to increased student engagement.

Thus, the following key findings are gleaned from the literature about the influence of instruction on students' perceptions:

- Students tend to reflect their teachers' beliefs about reading, but not with the specific use of reading strategies (Reutzel and Sabey, 1996; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997).

- Within a given context, the social interactions can influence student perceptions, and students can experience events differently, even within the same classroom (Ames, 1992; Nolen, 2007).

- While there are numerous motivational studies examining the links between self-concept, self-efficacy, and their influence on student engagement and motivation (Bong & Clark, 1999; Dweck, 2002; Linnenbrink, & Pintrich, 2003; Nolen, 2007; Pajares, 1996; Turner, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000), there is a need for additional investigation, particularly with respect to early readers, to add to the knowledge base.

- The tasks and strategies utilized in a classroom can affect motivation - e.g. open/closed, level of difficulty, performance vs. product orientation (Perry et al., 2002; Tunmer, 1995).

Therefore, the tasks and teaching strategies that teachers choose to use for instruction in their classrooms, as well as the social meaning and value assigned to them within the classroom, can have an effect on the motivation that comes from perceptions of self-efficacy. Studies have shown that higher self-efficacy and self-regulated learning can influence cognitive engagement, thereby impacting student learning (Ames, 1992; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Perry et al., 2002; Turner, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). To improve student learning, educators need to use instructional strategies that improve student perceptions leading to increased motivation and engagement.

Summary

Thus, the relevant literature was reviewed in the areas of teachers' beliefs and practical approaches, students' perceptions about good reading and self-perceptions, and the influence of instruction on student perceptions. As a result, the key findings that inform this study are listed below.

- *With respect to teachers' beliefs*: Teachers' beliefs may be most strongly rooted in their personal experiences, however, there is inconsistent evidence regarding the congruity of teachers' beliefs and their practical approaches to instruction. In addition, students tend to reflect their teachers' beliefs about reading, but not with the specific use of reading strategies.

- *With respect to students' perceptions*: Students seem to overemphasize the public, or observable, components of reading. Self-concept and self-efficacy may be related to students' self-perceptions and motivation.

- *With respect to the influence of instruction on students' perceptions*: Social interactions can influence student perceptions. The types of tasks and activities can affect motivation.

Therefore, the research shows good reading is an active process in which readers engage with text in order to decode and comprehend it. Good readers apply strategies with the intent to gain meaning from text and understand the message it relays (Gates, 2002; Scharer et al., 2005). Furthermore, successful early readers are going to demonstrate a positive self-concept and self-efficacy with respect to reading. They are going to demonstrate an understanding of the participatory nature of successful reading and share ideas that indicate a growing awareness of the importance of various components of effective reading including accuracy in decoding, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, with respect to reading, successful early readers are going to demonstrate a positive self-concept and self-efficacy as they experience reading success and persevere with various reading tasks. As this continues, good readers increase their problem-solving abilities and learn to apply a variety of strategies to effectively meet reading challenges.

In sum, although there are numerous studies on instruction, motivation, and self-efficacy in general, few studies focus on the link between reading instruction and student perceptions. Various studies touch on the social nature of reading and how students identify themselves as readers based on their perceived abilities (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Hall & Myers, 1998; Jinks & Lorsbach, 2003; Knapp, 2002; Landis, 2003). As student perspectives gain value, there is a

need to obtain additional information from students about their understanding, development and perceptions with respect to literacy (Dahl, 1995; Landis, 1999). The research is also missing the valuable contributions of transitional and early fluent readers, specifically. Currently, there is a lack of research considering the perspectives of readers who have recently gained a level of independence in their reading, but can still reflect and share their insight about the process of learning to read. Moreover, because a large part of learning to read and becoming a reader is socially constructed, the influence of teachers' reading instruction on student perceptions warrants further research. By understanding the impact of their perceptions and reading instruction, teachers can better design and organize their classrooms to have a positive impact on student learning.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This is a study of two second-grade classrooms. As the National Reading Panel and other "experts" try to improve early reading instruction by focusing on research in areas such as alphabetics, fluency, and comprehension, ultimately it is the teachers who implement the reading instruction in their classrooms (Morrison, Wilcox, Madrigal, Roberts, & Hintze, 1999; NICHD, 2000; Quick, 1998).   While the experiences of the students in these two classrooms may seem similar on the surface, there are differences in what the students emphasize as they discuss their experiences of becoming a reader. Through observation and targeted student interviews, this case study looks at this phenomenon. The purpose of this study is contribute to the current literature on early reading instruction by providing students with an opportunity to share their perceptions of what reading is and how they view themselves as readers. By examining reading from this critical angle, I hope to shed light on this important perspective.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Given two teachers with different theoretical orientations, yet the same practical approach to reading instruction, what do second grade students think is "good" reading and how do they view themselves as readers?

2. What is the relationship, if any, between teachers' beliefs and practices and students' understanding of reading?

3. Given the two teachers' different beliefs about reading, how do students respond differentially in these contexts?

Research Design

Qualitative research can generally be described as an exploration that uses the researcher as the instrument of data collection to gather information in an effort to describe a phenomenon in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Qualitative research focuses on "few cases and many variables" (Creswell, 1998, p. 16), thereby delving deeper into a study rather than broadly trying to generalize to numerous cases. Qualitative studies are suited for research questions that ask "how" or "what" and seek to describe with a more detailed view what is taking place in a particular, natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). Wiersma and Jurs (2005) describe qualitative research as an inductive process whose "approach is that of a holistic interpretation of the natural setting (p. 13)." Hence, this study is a qualitative one in order to describe the actions and interactions of teachers and students as they pertain to reading.

By accessing the participants in their natural setting, this topic can be explored and described in detail, with the participants more likely to be themselves (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, observing teachers and students in the classroom is critical as this environment, with all its complexities, influences the actions and interactions of those involved. Moreover, by using qualitative research, I can more fully describe and accurately tell the story of these teachers and students from their own perspectives (Creswell, 1998, p. 18-19). Since observation alone does not provide the richest description of a situation, I also used interviews to ascertain the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the teachers and students to better help me understand their actions.

Furthermore, a social constructivist framework is used to illuminate key concepts for this study. For example, the notion that all meaning (e.g. of events, texts, actions, etc.) is created

through human action and interaction amongst themselves and with their environment, helps one

to more deeply understand and appreciate what I witnessed taking place in the classrooms under

study (Kim, 2001). In addition, using this framework enhances my comprehension of the

students' perspectives as learning to read does not take place spontaneously, but is slowly

achieved through a series of social exchanges and experiences (Strickland et al., 2004).

Moreover, this research is framed using a case study design. Creswell (1998) describes a

case study as "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time

through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in

context" (p. 61). This study is a case in a bounded system - second grade reading classes in one

particular district, more specifically, in two of those classrooms. In addition, this study includes

detailed, in-depth data collection through observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Additionally, the context of this research is situated within the current educational climate of the

district. Finally, the data analysis includes the rich description, identification of themes, and

statements of assertions about the case, typical of a case study (Creswell, 1998).

Setting

The setting for this study is a primary school located in an affluent suburban town in

central New Jersey. While the school district is comprised of three schools serving students in

grades pre-kindergarten through eight, the primary school focuses on the needs of students in

pre-kindergarten through grade two. This modern building was completed in 2002 and houses

approximately 400 students, the majority of whom are Caucasian.

This location was selected for a number of reasons, the first being the district's relatively

recent implementation of a new literacy program. Specifically, teachers began utilizing the

Columbia Teachers College Reading Workshop approach. This teaching method involves direct

instruction of a specific reading teaching point during a mini-lesson lasting approximately 10

minutes. This is followed by a short period of active engagement during which students get a

chance to practice the skill with support and guidance. Next follows the largest block of time,

independent practice, which is dedicated to students working alone or in pairs to use all their

skills and strategies on an independent text at their reading level. During this time, the teacher

conferences with small groups and individual students to provide more targeted, differentiated

instruction. Finally, the class reconvenes for a short five to ten-minute share period in which

skills are reviewed and closure is brought to the workshop (Calkins & Martinelli, 2006).

Using this approach, a regular second-grade Readers Workshop lesson might look similar

to the following example:

The teacher calls the entire class to the carpet. Once settled, the mini-lesson
begins. After gaining the students' attention and introducing the topic in some way (e.g.
review, a thoughtful question, posing a typical reading problem, etc.), the teacher names
the teaching point, "Today we will learn…." The teacher then explicitly and directly
teaches the named point using a strategy such as modeling or thinking aloud. The idea is
to make clear and demonstrate a concept (visually, verbally, etc.) that is often taking
place internally. For example, if a teacher is teaching a lesson on decoding unknown
words by looking at word endings, he would name that point and then explain and
demonstrate it, probably through modeling and thinking aloud while looking at words on
a board. After showing this with a few examples, the students would have a chance to
practice the skill, while still there with the teacher on the carpet, during the active
engagement period of the lesson. While this can take place in various ways (turning and
talking with a partner, whole class practice decoding words from the board, etc.), the idea
is that students have an immediate, supported chance to practice applying the skill being
named. This is followed by the independent practice period of the workshop, usually the
longest in time. In this district, students are expected to read independently for
approximately 20-30 minutes by the end of the school year. During this time, students
are using sticky notes to record their thinking – questions they have, things they want to
discuss with a partner or teacher, an example of something from the mini-lesson, etc.
During this time, teachers confer with individual students or small groups, observing and
noting strengths, focusing on a personalized, differentiated teaching point specific to that
student's needs, and determining next steps to help that child grow as a reader. Some
conferences are conducted "on-demand," with the teacher doing some quick "research"
by observing the child, listening to him read, and/or asking a few questions. The teacher
then decides on a teaching point and works with the child exactly where he/she is on that
particular day. Other conferences could be pre-planned and focused on a needed teaching

point based on previous conferences and next steps. Finally, after a period of approximately 20-30 minutes the workshop begins to close, often with some partner time to allow the children to discuss their reading, but more importantly, there should be some whole-group closure. During the closure period, the teacher restates the teaching point and it is considered a skill or an idea that the children should have "from now on…." Teachers may also use this time to share an observation, remind students of a previously taught skill/concept, share a new brief teaching point, or set the stage for the next lesson. Certainly, teaching points are reviewed and practiced as time goes on, although it may be in a whole class setting or in differentiated conferences. However, moving on in that classroom environment, students are reminded that this skill/concept is now in their "toolbox."

Another reason this school was selected was for demographic reasons. As mentioned, the majority of students are Caucasian and the community can be considered primarily middle to upper-middle class. Hence, the study is less likely to be confounded by other variables such as poverty or racial marginalization. Finally, the setting was also selected based on ease of entry as I am a teacher in the district. Being a teaching member of the district, I am familiar with, and have access to, curricular information, materials, and the teaching strategies being promoted by the district.

<div align="center">Sample</div>

Second-grade was selected as the target population for this case study because this is an important year for students with respect to reading. Generally, by the completion of second grade, most students have learned to read with a level of independence. Yet, as early readers, they can reflect on their relatively recent experiences of learning to read and share their perceptions of themselves as successful readers.

Teachers

After obtaining teachers' consent to participate in this study (see Appendix A), I used the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) as a sampling tool to narrow down the participants from the pool of six second grade teachers (DeFord, 1985). This validated

survey is intended to identify teachers' general theoretical orientations, or beliefs, toward

teaching reading (see Appendix B). This instrument attempts to categorize teachers within three

different theoretical orientations to reading instruction: phonics, skills, and whole language.

Using a 5-point Likert scale, teachers indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with

statements about reading and reading instruction. For example, teachers have to indicate their

agreement with the statement, "A child needs to be able to verbalize the rules of phonics in order

to assure proficiency in processing new words," on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5

(strongly disagree). Another example is, "If a child says 'house' for the written word 'home,'

the response should be left uncorrected." This instrument was developed, piloted, and eventually

validated using a number of procedures. It was administered to a sample of 90 teachers of

known theoretical orientation, profiles of the three categories were compared with responses

from judges in the field of reading, and trained observers observed 14 teachers and then

predicted the teachers' responses on the TORP instrument based on what they had seen.

Subsequently, the TORP was deemed valid and reliable "through use of descriptive data, factor

analysis and discriminant analysis" (DeFord, 1985, p. 351).

All six surveys were returned and scored as directed. After determining each teacher's

theoretical orientation to reading instruction, I planned to work with two teachers from differing

theoretical orientations as identified in the survey: phonics, skills, and whole language. A

phonics orientation was considered for those scoring 0-65, a skills orientation for 66-110 scores,

and a whole language orientation for those scoring 111-140. However, the survey results

indicated that all six teachers' orientations fell in the "skills orientation" with scores ranging

from 71-103. Therefore, I chose to work with the two teachers with the most disparate scores,

the 71 and the 103, as they were the farthest apart, although they were still in the skills orientation.

The first teacher, Mrs. N, scored a 71 on the TORP, indicating a skills theoretical orientation toward reading instruction, but on the lower end of the range, closer to a phonics orientation. Mrs. N is a veteran teacher with a master's degree and over 20 years of teaching experience. She thinks of herself as a strong reading teacher and, at the time of our interview, was beginning to feel comfortable with the Reading Workshop model the district had put in place. She believes phonics provides a foundation for reading and that it should be taught like basic math facts. She feels the current reading instruction is very "hit or miss" and would like to see a newer version of a basal reader (interview, 6/13/11).

Next, the second selected teacher, Mrs. C., scored a 103 on the TORP, also indicating a skills theoretical orientation, but closer to the whole language orientation. In fact, in her own words she thinks of whole language as "good teaching" and as a descriptor of what she does; although she acknowledges that there are different "versions" of it (interview, 6/10/11). Mrs. C also has a master's degree, has been teaching for more than 15 years, considers herself a good reading teacher, and believes that is her purpose, "That's what I do." She believes children do not need to learn skills following a specific scope and sequence, but that skills need to be imbedded in everything you do in reading. Mrs. C believes children need to be given plenty of time to read independently and in small groups, with the more modeling the better. She mentions a big focus on decoding and comprehension, but references always starting with what makes sense first.

Students

After determining these two classrooms based on the teachers' TORP information, I drew another purposeful sample from the students in the two separate classrooms with teachers' permission. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) described maximum variation as a sampling strategy in which participants are selected "because they provide the greatest differences in certain characteristics" (p. 312). In an effort to achieve maximum variation, I used the following criteria to help me select my participants from each of the identified classrooms. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Student Selection Criteria

Criteria	Rationale
1. Returned parental consent form	Interviews were planned with individual students to gain understanding of their perceptions; students would be unable to participate in interviews without consent forms.
2. Receive main reading instruction with the classroom teacher	This study is focusing on the reading instruction in the general education classroom; therefore, students with individual education plans (IEPs) were excluded as they received their reading instruction in a resource room setting.
3. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Level	Provides documentation about the students as readers; teachers in this district use these running records to assess a student's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, based on a leveled reading system.
4. High, medium, and low level readers within a class	An effort to achieve maximum variation as described by Wiersma and Jurs (2005)
5. Gender	An effort to achieve maximum variation as described by Wiersma and Jurs (2005)

First, all students that return consent forms were included (Appendix C), provided that they receive their main reading instruction with the classroom teacher. This was something I thought to be a critical aspect to this research and this ensured that I would be able to interview students one-on-one in a semi-structured interview. Students with individualized education plans who left the room for reading instruction were excluded as this research was exploring reading instruction in the general education classroom setting.

Next, I reviewed all the eligible students' benchmark running records. The district utilizes the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to help teachers conduct running records. These running records are individual one-on-one reading conferences in which a teacher assesses a student's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension based on a leveled reading system. Students read a portion of the text aloud and, depending on the reading level, may finish reading silently. The teacher and student then discuss the text, with the teacher questioning and prompting the student to assess his or her level of text comprehension.

Afterward, I divided the class into thirds based on reading level as derived from district and teachers' observations and assessments, including running records. I randomly selected two students from each third (high, medium, low). In an effort to get approximately equal numbers of each gender in my sample, I planned to select one boy and one girl, provided that there were both genders in the group; however, this was not always possible. When necessary, I sought the classroom teacher's input as to which child may be a better participant to interview (e.g. more outgoing and likely to talk, not so quiet and shy). In all, I had two students from a high, medium, and low level within each classroom, for a total of six students per classroom. Since this study used student participants from two different classrooms, there were a total of 12 second-grade

students in the study. A summary of the student participants from each class can be found in

Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Summary of Characteristics of Student Participants in Mrs. N's class (TORP Score of 71)

Name	Gender	Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Level	Position in Class (High, Medium, Low)
Christian	Male	Q	High
Abby	Female	O	High
Matteo	Male	N	Middle
Zyaira	Female	N	Middle
Bradan	Male	L	Low
James	Male	J	Low

Note. *TORP* Score Scale: 0-65 = Phonics orientation, 66-110 = Skills-based orientation, 111-140 = Whole-language orientation. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Level for Grade 2 students at this point in the year is Level M. Students reading at that level are considered to be meeting grade level standards, above that level are exceeding standards, and below that level are not yet meeting grade level standards.

Table 3

Summary of Characteristics of Student Participants in Mrs. C's class (TORP Score of 103)

Name	Gender	Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Level	Position in Class (High, Medium, Low)
Mark	Male	Q	High
Lauren	Female	P	High
Nick	Male	O	Middle
Michela	Female	O	Middle
Finn	Male	M	Low
Erin	Female	M	Low

Note. *TORP* Score Scale: 0-65 = Phonics orientation, 66-110 = Skills-based orientation, 111-140 = Whole-language orientation. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Level for Grade 2 students at this point in the year is Level M. Students reading at that level are considered to be meeting grade level standards, above that level are exceeding standards, and below that level are not yet meeting grade level standards.

Data Collection and Management

Data Sources

In conducting this research as a qualitative case study, I used various sources and methods of data collection as typical of that design (Creswell, 1998). After obtaining a purposeful sample of classroom teachers from differing theoretical approaches using the TORP survey as described above, I collected various documents including lesson plans and running records that are typically readily available in a second-grade classroom in the district. Next, to gather extensive, rich qualitative data, I conducted systematic observations of both teachers and students in the classroom setting. In all, I visited each classroom three times for approximately 30-45 minutes at a time. These observations focused on both teachers' and students' actions and interactions to gain insight into the congruence of teachers' beliefs and their practical approaches, as well as a better understanding of second-graders' perceptions of reading, and of themselves as readers. To help triangulate my observations, and provide more in-depth understanding, I engaged in individual semi-focused interviews with each of the participants to document their views on the phenomenon. All the while, I maintained a research journal to record my reflections on my thoughts and actions in the role of researcher. Each of these sources of data were selected in an effort to help answer the research questions that guided the study. (See Table 4 at the end of this section.)

Observations. Marshall and Rossman (1999) define observation as "the systematic notice and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts" in the research setting (p. 107). As part of the district's literacy curriculum, students engage in a sustained reading period that lasts approximately 20-45 minutes, depending on the grade level, class, and time of year. A variety of typical reading activities take place during this period and may include a focused mini-lesson,

independent reading, partner-reading, individual conferencing with a teacher, or small-group

literacy work. After obtaining all necessary approval, I asked the selected teachers to send me

copies of their schedules and general Reading Workshop plans for the upcoming two weeks.

While I used the plans to help guide me, the dates and times of the observations were determined

mainly by scheduling factors as I still had to carry out my regular teaching duties during my

research period. Hence, most observations took place during my preparation or lunch periods

and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. While teachers were aware I would be coming to

observe them during the week, they agreed to let me "drop in" and conduct my observations at

any time during that period. This was beneficial in case anything pressing came up in my

classroom and I was unable to attend a "scheduled" observation but, moreover, it lent credibility

to my observations as the teacher did not specifically prepare a lesson for my visit.

At the beginning of each observation, I slipped into the room quietly as not to disturb the

class. Each time, the classes were transitioning to Readers Workshop or the students were

already sitting on the carpet with the teacher for the mini-lesson portion of Readers Workshop. I

positioned myself on the perimeter of the classroom, out of the direct line of the students unless

they specifically turned to look at me. Generally, I used this part of the observation to get an

overall sense of the teacher's interaction with the class in order to document and describe what

was taking place (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I watched and listened for the questions she

would ask. What comments did she make to students? How did she explain the day's teaching

point – did she seem to emphasize a particular orientation in her instruction (e.g. phonics, skills,

whole language)? As I observed, I jotted notes in my field journal about what I was witnessing

using an observation protocol to help guide me (Appendix D). All through the observation, I

noted how the lesson progressed from the beginning on the carpet until its closure, jotting the time of each transition in the margin.

During the Active Engagement portion of the lesson, I scooted a little closer to the students in order to hear what they were talking about. I did my best to record in writing exactly what I was hearing and was sure to use quotation marks in my jottings when I found a statement particularly interesting and recorded it exactly as it was said. In addition, I used my possible observation codes as listed in the protocol to focus on, and distinguish between, indicators of phonics, skills, and whole language orientations and behaviors.

Next, when the workshop moved into the Independent Practice period, I checked to see if the teacher was conferencing with students. If so, I watched and listened to at least one conference to ascertain what the teachers deemed important to conference about with students. Moreover, I noted in my research journal the main point of the conference as well as the language both the teacher and the student were using to talk about reading.

When not focused on a teacher-student conference during this time, I observed to gain an overall sense of how the students act and interact with books and each other during a period of independent reading. Guided by the protocol, I looked to see what choices students had with respect to reading and what decisions did they make for themselves. Could they independently choose books, where to read, or with whom to work? Or, were these decisions more teacher-directed? After spending a few minutes getting an overall picture, I attempted to check in and focus on students that I would be interviewing, but not necessarily ignoring others. I observed students' choices, actions, and interactions with text and each other, focusing on what I could see and hear. I paid attention to the language used in partner talk during my time observing in the classrooms. I attempted to describe the quality of the talk, in order to note whether or not it

mirrored the reading language of the teacher, be it from mini-lessons, conferences, or my interview with them.

In general, I used the observation periods to get a holistic description of how Readers Workshop looked and sounded in each of the teacher's classrooms (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I took notes on the classroom context, the teacher, the students, and the activities as they related to reading in order to help build a rich description of the classroom setting. Guided by my research questions and possible observation codes, I was especially interested in actions or language that reflected either teachers' or students' beliefs about reading from a phonics, skills, or whole language orientation. I used this time to get a sense of teachers' practical approaches to instruction and to observe the students' actions during reading time. All of my observations were recorded in the form of field jottings and reviewed each evening following an observation. During the review, I added details and clarified what I had recorded when appropriate, and transformed the jottings into full field notes as soon as possible after the observation.

Teacher interviews. Further, more in-depth data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews with each of the two identified classroom teachers, guided by a structured protocol (see Appendix E). The interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times within the regular hours of the school day.   Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, was audio-recorded, electronically stored, and later transcribed separately. While guided by a structured protocol, I attempted to make the interviews more informal and conversational in nature in order to best enable the "participant's perspective on the phenomenon" to become known (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108).

As previously noted, I am a teacher in the district and, as such, I was a familiar interviewer with these teachers and we had an already-established rapport. Hence, this was

beneficial as effective interviews require cooperation and personal interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I believe that my familiarity helped the participants feel comfortable enough to speak freely about their beliefs and practices in teaching reading. During the teacher interviews, teachers were asked about what they theoretically thought good reading instruction involves and their perceptions of their current reading instruction with respect to both district and curricular mandates, as well as being reflective of their personal practices. They were asked to reflect on the reading instruction they personally received as students, in addition to college and other coursework that prepared them to teach reading. Furthermore, follow-up questions were posed based on their responses on the initial TORP survey. If teachers strongly agreed or disagreed with an item on the survey, that statement was brought up for further discussion and explanation. The purpose of the interviews was to "uncover and describe the participants' perspectives on events" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 110) that shaped their theoretical and practical approaches to reading instruction, and then compare the teachers' reflections with the TORP survey results and classroom observations to see how closely they corresponded to help validate the data.

Student interviews. Similarly, through semi-structured interviews with the students, I sought to better understand and describe their unique perceptions as participants engaged in the process of learning to read and becoming a reader. Interview questions were developed based on those from the Burke Reading Interview as listed by Reutzel & Sabey (1996) and originally created by this researcher based on the study's research questions (see Student Interview Protocol, Appendix F). Each student interview was one-on-one in a separate quiet room in the school (e.g. empty classroom, conference room, etc.) and took place when he/she would not miss any direct instruction in the classroom (e.g. independent work period, group music rehearsal,

etc.). Although these interview sessions sometimes followed, or occurred on the same day as, an observation period, this was not always the case. Ultimately, the interview schedule was dependent on mutually convenient times considering my teaching schedule, the classroom teacher's schedule, and the best times for the students to briefly leave the class (e.g. least amount of disruption, not a period of direct instruction, not a special activity, etc.).

Once we got settled in the interview space, I first re-introduced myself and told each child that I was there to find out what kids think about reading because, often, no one asks kids. I explained that while their parents had said it was okay, they still had a choice about whether to stay and talk to me or not. I also made sure that they knew there were no right or wrong answers to my questions; I just wanted to hear what they thought, and then I asked if they still wanted to talk to me. Though some students were more loquacious than others, each of the selected students agreed to be interviewed.

During the interview, students were first asked questions about reading at school and home, favorite books, and what they remember about learning to read. It was common for me to have to probe and ask for more elaboration from the students at the beginning of the interview with questions like, "What do you mean by that?" and "Can you tell me more about that?" Although the interview setting may have seemed unusual to students at first, they generally seemed to acclimate quickly and became more comfortable with the interview format. This was evidenced by the students becoming more talkative and forthcoming in sharing their thoughts. Next, students were asked questions that related more to their reading self-concept such as, "What kind of reader do you think you are? What makes you say that?" and asked about their goals for themselves as readers. Further questions probed their thoughts about themselves as readers in relation to others in their class. Finally, students were asked what teachers might do to

help a reader and how could you tell if someone was doing 'good reading'. Thus, through

interviews, I was able to gain information to describe the ways a variety of students understand

the concept of reading and to shed light on their perspectives of themselves as readers.

All interviews were audio-recorded, assigned a label to link it to the corresponding

participant, and stored electronically. Next, after the period of data collection was complete,

each of the interviews was transcribed individually. Written transcriptions were photocopied;

one copy was kept in a labeled folder for each student as a master copy and the others were cut

apart and sorted into categories during data analysis as appropriate. The written transcriptions

were also stored electronically in their entirety and assigned labels linking them to the

corresponding participants.

Documents and artifacts. Marshall & Rossman (1999) state that "history and context

surrounding a specific setting come, in part, from reviewing documents" (p. 116). By reviewing

some typical classroom documents, I sought to add an additional layer of understanding to the

context of teachers' and students' perspectives regarding reading instruction. As part of this

endeavor, I requested to review copies of documents typical of a second-grade reading classroom

including class lists of students with their identified reading levels, running records, reading

workshop lesson plans, and copies of any written reading response activities.

First, I collected class lists from the two classrooms selected based on teachers' identified

theoretical orientations to reading (from the TORP survey). The class lists included all members

of the class as well as the students' current reading levels as determined by the classroom

teacher. This list was used to help me draw a purposeful sample of students from high, middle,

and low reading levels as designated within the confines of the class.

Next, I also collected copies of the most recent running record data sheets for the selected student participants. These documents are completed during one-on-one reading assessments between the teacher and student a minimum of three times a year. Running records reflect a student's reading skills and abilities in various areas including accuracy, fluency, self-correction, and comprehension. The purpose of collecting the running records was to assist me in understanding both the teacher as a reading teacher and the student as a reader. There are many components that can be completed and analyzed in a running record, but it is my experience that teachers generally do not choose to fully complete and analyze every possible aspect. By noticing what components the teacher focused on, as well as the notes and comments that she wrote, it helped give me insight as to what she determined as important to focus on when assessing and reading with students in this manner. Moreover, the running records helped give me a clearer picture of each student participant as a reader before I interviewed him or her. By looking over these documents, I had a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the student as a reader.

In addition, I collected reading workshop lesson plans from the participating teachers. At the time of collection, there was no single district mandated structure to these lesson plans other than the fact that they needed to include some basic components. Lesson plans needed to outline a lesson's measurable goal or, in workshop models, the day's teaching point. Though encouraged to document differentiation strategies, differentiation is generally understood to be inherent in the workshop model through individual and small group teacher conferences. Finally, plans should include a means of evaluation which, again, usually consists of teachers' anecdotal notes and conference records in the workshop model. While teachers did have some common planning time, the interviewed teachers described it as limited and tending to be a

"check-in" with grade-level teammates; it was generally used as a time to focus on upcoming requirements (e.g. establishing assessments to be administered, scheduling assemblies, planning end-of-year activities, etc.). However, both teachers shared in their interviews that most teachers on the grade level used the same basic grid of sequenced lesson plans for a unit with modifications as they deemed fit. These grids had been created by teachers on the team (grade-level), used, and revised over the years. Hence, the collected Reading Workshop lesson plans did not vary much as they contained the same or similar teaching points, differentiation through the workshop model, and evaluation through teacher observation, student conferences, and anecdotal records. While the lessons themselves may have been more varied, the plans were basically the same and therefore used more for the purpose of scheduling observations and interviews.

In addition to helping me understand the teachers' perspectives, this triangulation of information helped ensure the validity of the information I obtained. By gathering information and evidence from interviews and observations, this added to the strength of the fieldwork and the findings of my study (Wolcott, 2001).

Organizing the data. Data management included the organization of equipment as well as paper documents. Original paper documents (questionnaires, interview transcripts, and field notes, etc.) were kept in a separate accordion-folder for each class, with the information grouped by participant. For example, I maintained an accordion-folder for Mrs. N's class. Classroom observations were kept in a file folder in a pocket of the accordion-folder, Mrs. N's interview transcription was in a separate file folder within the same accordion-folder, and so on for each of the students' interviews. Similarly, I maintained a second accordion-folder for Mrs. C's class with the corresponding documentation. File folders were color-coded separately by class; all

participants from Mrs. N's class used one color, while those in Mrs. C's class had another.   For each participant, I placed the full paper copy of my transcribed interview with that student, my interview notes, and any applicable field notes or paper documents. Audio-recordings and field notes were also merged into computer files, labeled and categorized by participant, activity (observation or interview), and date. Photocopies of the interview and observation documents were also organized into data sets, grouped by classroom. Anything that was produced on my home computer (e.g. field notes) was kept in a computer file labeled with the subject's name and was also backed-up on a flash drive.

Situating the researcher. For this study, I must recognize my unique role as both a researcher and a teacher in the district, as well as a colleague to the people I observed. When the data was collected, it was my twelfth year of teaching in the district with the majority of that time having been spent at the second-grade level. The prior September, I had been transferred to third grade in a different school, and there were various other teaching reassignments throughout the district, including others at the second-grade level. Hence, while the team of second-grade teachers was not the same as when I was there, I must acknowledge that I have worked with many of them, in some capacity, during my time in the district.

As a seasoned teacher in the district, with experience at the grade level I planned to study, I was familiar with the structures in place. I knew the curricular demands and the classroom structure the district administration expected to be in place. I recognized the high expectations being placed on both teachers and students to ensure student learning. I was also aware that the district was expecting some level of uniformity to the implementation of Readers Workshop, such as the structure of the lesson and the approximate time frames for each lesson component. However, I also understood that, like with many districts, initiatives can be over-routinized in

order to make sure the program is being implemented as dictated. For example, timing mini-lessons and having a literacy coach observe and note whether a teacher is following the designated format takes away from the art of teaching and adds to the performance pressures of teachers. Given this context, one might not expect teachers' observable practices to look very different; however, I also used interviews to shed more light on their thoughts and beliefs about effective reading instruction.

As a result of my intimate familiarity with the district, grade-level, curriculum, and teachers, I had to think more deeply about my personal views toward reading instruction and account for any personal bias. Upon reflection, I realized that while I had used this approach for a relatively short time (about three years), I could see "the positives" of the Columbia Teachers College Workshop approach for my students. Possible benefits included a greater overall immersion in reading and writing, exposing the students to more and higher-level literature, and giving them more independence and autonomy with respect to their own lives as readers. Yet, my concerns were greater. What about the fast pace of instruction? Though teaching points could be repeated as necessary with individuals and small groups in conferences, the suggested whole class teaching points changed daily. I worried about students who needed more time to understand a concept or practice a skill. Would there be enough basic foundational "skills" being taught? My personal experiences led me to believe these skills were lacking, especially for those students who came to me as struggling readers. This reading approach did not seem to be as good a fit for them as it was for more successful, independent readers. Of most concern, was the idea that we, as educators, were missing the big picture by being so tied to a particular approach. We were being trained and coached in how to use the Teacher College Workshop approach, with a seeming over-emphasis on routines, sequence, and documentation. We were

learning what to do and say and when to do and say it. We had to have conference notes with particular information to document what we had taught and/or practiced with the students with whom we met during the independent reading period. The concept of "conferring" scared many teachers; not necessarily because they did not have good teaching sense and judgment, rather because we were being given the message that there was one "right" or "correct" way to conduct a reading lesson. The oversimplification of the routines the administration expected to be in place and witness when entering a classroom sometimes felt like a bigger focus than the reading instruction itself, or the student learning taking place. I was not sure if skills-based or a whole language approach to reading instruction was more effective, but I had a sense that a balanced approach would provide a greater benefit to our students. I felt that by committing 110% to any particular delineated approach, and specifically teaching it using the same step-by-step routines and methods, we were missing the bigger picture and students were getting lost in the shuffle of educators trying to do the "latest and greatest" thing to hit the field.

Researcher stance. To account for this, I was ready to be as transparent with the teachers as possible, prepared to answer any questions they had about my study or interview questions. I did not want anything to feel artificial, or that walls had gone up, separating us on some level. As such, I took a stance as a collaborator during the interviews, consistent with a feminist approach to interviewing (Creswell, 1998). I viewed the interviews as periods of interactive dialogue, rather than as a researcher solely asking questions to elicit a response from the participant. I tried to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' views and beliefs, but also attempted to push their thinking at times, responding and sharing my own thoughts, as appropriate, to build on what they were saying. While a short bit of the first interview and observation sessions were slightly awkward, this quickly dissipated and everything felt

"normal." I feel this approach assisted me in gaining cooperation and encouraging the teachers'

to share valuable insight into their beliefs, assuring them that I was trying to gain information

rather than to critique and judge.

When observing the students in their classrooms, I tried to maintain a role as a neutral

observer as much as possible in order to get a more genuine picture of the students in the natural

classroom community. When I entered the classroom for the first time, the teachers introduced

me to the class and told the students that I was there because I wanted to learn more about how

kids learn to read and what they think of reading. The students were told that I was there to learn

from them, they should just do their regular reading work, and I would be around to watch,

listen, and learn. When whole group lessons were taking place, I sat in the back corner of the

room where I could easily listen and observe the lesson, but I was not in the view of the students

unless they completely turned around to look at me. During independent and partner reading

time, I would move to various areas of the room to better observe and listen to students on whom

I was focusing, but still stayed outside the main action as much as possible. Of course, when

approached, I was friendly and participated in short conversations and answered questions about

my identity and role within the classroom, but I was careful to remove myself as much as I could

and not take an active role in conversations or activities during periods of observation.

Table 4

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Data Sources
1. Given two teachers with different theoretical orientations, yet the same practical approach to reading instruction, what do second grade students think is "good" reading and how do they view themselves as readers?	Classroom observations Student interviews
2. What is the relationship, if any, between teachers' beliefs and practices and students' understanding of reading?	Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) Classroom documents (Running records, lesson plans) Classroom observations Teacher and student interviews
3. Given the two teachers' different beliefs about reading, how do students respond differentially in these contexts?	Classroom observations Student interviews

Data Analysis

Overall, there were four stages to my data analysis. The first stage was a preliminary one in which my purpose was to get a holistic understanding of my data. During this period, I read through every piece of data in its entirety, multiple times, to get a better sense of what I had in front of me. I wrote overall "summaries" of my impressions for each participant before going back to the data and beginning to sort and categorize it according to research question. The next stage of analysis involved looking at the data in a more individualistic manner and coding and re-coding it using both deductive and inductive codes. The third stage was, again, more holistic in nature as I used the data to find patterns and themes that led to my findings presented in the form of two cases. Finally, the last stage of analysis consisted of a cross-case comparison.

Stage One: Preliminary Analysis

As data analysis is a recursive process, I actually began my preliminary analysis while involved in data collection and management. A first method of organization and preliminary analysis was the maintenance of a research journal in which I recorded my reflections on my methods and decisions during the research process, and memos to myself. As I continuously described and kept record of my actions as a researcher, I was able to refer back to this journal to help me reflect on my methodology and data analysis. In addition, by establishing this "audit trail," readers will better be able to analyze both the process and the product of my research to help establish validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

First, I wanted to get a sense of the entire body of data and carefully read piece of data. This included all teacher and student interviews, as well as the classroom observations and pertinent documents (e.g. running records, lesson plans, etc.). As I did, I jotted down ideas in my research journal and in the margins of the transcripts. These ideas included overall impressions,

notes for possible codes, questions or things I was wondering, and connections that I was making

to the relevant literature. I proceeded through the data in class sets, starting with the teacher

interviews, then student interviews, and, finally, classroom observations and other documents.

I started with the teacher interviews as they generally took place at the beginning of the

data collection period and were the most in-depth data source to provide relevant background

information. Similarly, I then made my way through the student interviews in which students

explained their perceptions of reading and their views of themselves as readers. I finished with

the observations and classroom documents (e.g. lesson plans, schedules, etc.) as they helped me

orient and "ground" what I had learned from the participants' thoughts within the observable

classroom activities.

After carefully reviewing each document, I reflected on my impressions and the

information I obtained, and recorded my thoughts in the form of a quick case summary or memo

in my research journal. Richards (2005) recommends reducing the data record as far as possible,

without sacrificing important information, through the use of carefully documented decisions.

Therefore, while I holistically analyzed each interview, I simultaneously removed any

unnecessary conversation, off-topic ramblings and other material that did not relate to my

research questions.

After this initial holistic review, I began using typological analysis to sort the documents,

interview, and observation data according to my research questions, separately for each class set.

Hatch (2002) describes typological analysis as a manner of data analysis that begins by dividing

the data into categories based on typologies derived from theory, research questions, and/or

common sense (p. 152). I sorted the data into meaningful "chunks" of information that seemed

to correspond to a research question. This time, I drew lines and began to chunk and organize

the data according to my research questions. For example, on a transcript page, I would

underline or put a box around a line or section. In the margin, I put a 1, 2, or 3 to indicate the

guiding research question(s) that I thought best associated with that particular chunk of data. If

data fit in more than one category, a photocopy was used to be able to place the same

information in multiple categories. Pieces of the photocopies data were cut apart as appropriate

and placed in file folders for each research question, separately for each class set. Prior to being

cut apart and placed in separate folders, notes were made in the margins to correspond with the

original document to enable me to reference the full context of the information later and to

ensure that they could be positively linked to the correct participant and/or original data record.

Next, once the data was organized according to research question, I started to review the

data pieces in this format. Starting with the first research question, I read the data chunks and

assigned them broad labels such as "Good Reading," "Self as Readers," and "Learning to Read."

These general labels were developed from the research questions, the themes in the interview

questions, and the corresponding data sources. The initial labels according to research question

can be seen in Table 5. Finally, this stage of preliminary analysis ended as I wrote "answers" to

my research questions based on my overall impressions from the data thus far.

Table 5

Initial Labels According to Research Question

Research Question	Labels
1. Given two teachers with different theoretical orientations, yet the same practical approach to reading instruction, what do second grade students think is "good" reading and how do they view themselves as readers?	Good Reading Self-Perceptions Learning to Read Strategy Use
2. What is the relationship, if any, between teachers' beliefs and practices and students' understanding of reading?	Phonics Skills Whole Language Beliefs Practices
3. Given the two teachers' different beliefs about reading, how do students respond differentially in these contexts?	Good Reading Self-Perceptions Learning to Read Strategy Use

Stage Two: Coding

  The coding process can be considered "the formal representation of analytic thinking" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 155). During this time the researcher thoroughly reads and rereads the accumulated data, marking passages with codes. First, however, I reexamined one randomly selected set of class data on a holistic level trying to get a sense of this class, not only learn its observable practices and activities, but also better understand its more subtle underlying classroom culture. Again, I took notes, jotting down my overall impressions and modifying my case summaries before doing the same thing with the other set of class data.

  Creswell (1998) suggests that researchers try to start the coding process with five or six categories and then expand as necessary, attempting to not surpass 25-30 categories. Later in the process, he suggests to try to reduce the categories back to five or six main areas, or themes, on which to base the narrative writing. Hence, I began the coding process by looking at the preliminary labels created in my first stage of analysis. At this point, I resorted my data chunks into categories based on these labels, organized separately by class set. This content coding enabled me to reduce my data into more easily manageable chunks for analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26).

  Next, I started with the student data (the primary data sources for research questions one and three) as they represented the bulk of the data and the primary focus of this study. This data primarily included classroom observations and student interviews, already separated into chunks based on the preliminary labels. Throughout the coding process, there were codes I had anticipated based on my review of the literature and my experiences as a classroom teacher. I expected students to refer to accuracy with a notion of reading words correctly, not making mistakes, and sounding words out. However, I also hoped to hear good readers articulate some

of the many other strategies they are exposed to in order to help them figure out unknown words,

such as skipping the word and going back to it, thinking about what makes sense, and chunking

longer words into smaller known parts. I hoped to hear a greater understanding of the

complexity of "fluency," and not just a reference to how fast someone reads. I wondered how

much emphasis, if any, students would put on the importance of comprehension when reading.

As teachers, we know that it is a critical component of our reading instruction, yet, I had not seen

the same view exhibited by students in my previous experience.

In addition, I was very curious about the students' discussion and insight into their self-

perceptions as readers. As a classroom teacher, this perspective was not one I had much

experience with discussing with my students. In general, although I knew I wanted my students

to enjoy and appreciate reading with a level of success and independence, I had focused on their

skills and abilities in the reading constructs I was teaching and assessing regularly: accuracy,

fluency, and comprehension. I hoped students had positive self-perceptions and self-efficacies

about themselves as readers, although I wanted them to be realistic. Good readers should be able

to select appropriate "just-right" books and read them with both a high level of accuracy and

comprehension. Moreover, while they may not be able to articulate those notions, students with

a positive self-concept of themselves as readers should be able to recognize and indicate if a

book is a good fit for them, based on a number of factors including interest and/or the ability to

decode and comprehend the text, not just a level assigned by a teacher. Similarly, such students

would exhibit an interest in books and look forward to more reading experiences within a series,

a content area, or based on others' recommendations. Finally, I believed these kinds of readers

would exude some level of confidence in their reading ability and the strategies/skills they

possessed to tackle the reading challenges they encountered. On the other hand, students with

more negative self-perceptions about themselves as readers might speak less favorably about reading, exhibit little desire to read without prompting, have few strategies to apply to their reading, and not be able to self-select appropriate "just-right" books.

As I began coding, I applied a combination of codes from relevant literature as well as others I saw emerging from the data. I started with codes such as "phonics", "fluency", and "comprehension" as derived from the National Reading Panel's report on standards in reading (NICHD, 2000). The code "phonics" was applied to text that references the concepts of sounding out words or noticing vowel or letter patterns. "Fluency" codes were applied to material that suggested speed, smoothness, or use of expression. The code of "comprehension" was used to tag data that mentioned understanding or knowing what words mean. As I did this, I noticed other inductive content codes that presented themselves. For example, additional codes that came to light were "accuracy" and "levels." Accuracy referred to students who talked about readers "knowing all the words," "not getting any words wrong," or "never making mistakes." "Levels" was the code assigned when students mentioned particular letter levels of books based on the district's assessment system (A, B, C… etc.).

While "fluency" was a code I had anticipated, through analysis I saw a differentiation between fluency as speed and/or smoothness, and other students who saw fluency as reading with expression. Therefore, while I coded them all as "fluency," I did note a sub-code of speed or expression to see if this might provide more detailed information during analysis. As the list of codes grew, I looked for patterns and began grouping them into codes and sub-codes. For example, although I coded passages with terms such as "hard words," "levels," or "number of pages/chapters," I clustered these under the larger code of "difficulty." The master list of codes can be found in Table 6.

This coding process was repeated for all the student data (one class at a time) using a constant comparative method. Creswell (1998) defined this method of analysis as "taking information", or codes, from data and "comparing it to emerging categories" in subsequent data (p. 57). Furthermore, the observation data that correlated with each particular class was coded and analyzed in the same way until the content in all of the student interviews and observations was coded. Throughout the coding process, I maintained a master list of codes in my research journal along with their definitions to preserve the accuracy and consistency of my coding. Moreover, I used "memos" in my research journal to record my thoughts regarding the data, note the relationships among the codes, and to connect my data to applicable literature. Miles and Huberman (1994) described memoing as "one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools" as it can "tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster" (p. 72).

Afterward, I repeated the same recursive coding process focusing on the teachers' beliefs and practices. Again, I reread the teacher interviews in their entirety to get a wholistic sense of them as people and modified their case summaries as necessary. Subsequently, I resorted the labeled chunks of the interview data according to the preliminary labels, keeping each teacher's data separate from the other. I then coded following a similar process to that as described for the students' data. As the TORP survey reflected "codes" by design, I did not need to re-invent codes, but sorted and organized the teachers' responses to the survey items into groups based on if they were indicators of a phonics, skills, or whole language orientation. Similarly, I coded the teacher interview and classroom observation data with the same three codes, but used a "B" or "P" before the term to indicate a belief or practice. After coding the data, I reexamined it looking for information that supported or contradicted the interview statements or TORP data. Specifically, I looked to see the level of correspondence between each teacher's beliefs and her

practices. This allowed me to more critically examine the selected teacher's interview responses, and compare them to observation and interview data, thereby adding more validity to the information being gained.

Eventually, each class set of data was examined and analyzed. Working with only one class set of data at a time, I reviewed and coded student interviews, classroom observations, and teacher interviews and TORP data. Codes were both deductive and inductive as I thought about the relevant literature and used those codes when applicable, yet also remained open to other codes that presented themselves. All the while, I maintained a master list of codes and modified it as necessary (e.g. adding, eliminating, combining, etc.). Ultimately, the coding list was finalized (see Table 6) and became the basis for my findings in the next stage of analysis.

Table 6

Master List of Codes

Labels	Codes	Relevant Sub-codes
Good Reading	GR - Difficulty	- hard words - level # pages/chapters
	GR - Accuracy	- strategies - phonics/sounding out - spelling
	GR – Fluency	- speed - smooth - expression
	GR – Comprehension	
	GR – Interest	- practice - time - love to read
Self-Perceptions	SP - Difficulty	- hard words - level # pages/chapters
	SP - Accuracy	- strategies - phonics/sounding out - spelling
	SP – Fluency	- speed - smooth - expression
	SP - Comprehension	
	SP – Social	- comparison - competition
	SP – Interest	series
Learning to Read	L –Read to	
	L- Learn words	
	L - Practice	

	L - Levels	
	L - Sounding out	
Strategy Use	S -Phonics	• sound out • chunk • beginnings/endings • letters/word parts
	S - Skip	• skip and go back • skip and move on
	S - Meaning	
	S - Ask	• ask peer • ask adult
Phonics	B - Phonics	
	P - Phonics	
Skills	B- Skills	
	P-Skills	
Whole Language	B- Whole Language	
	P- Whole Language	

Stage Three: Using the Findings to Build the Cases

In this stage of analysis, I sought to put the individual bits of coded data back into more meaningful findings as described by Creswell (1998, p. 154). After all coding was completed, I cut apart chunks of data (ensuring they could still be traced back to the original context) and sorted them into piles based on their assigned codes. Each pile was organized and stored in a labeled file folder, color-coded by class. Working with one code at a time, still separated by class set, I manipulated the bits of data, grouping and re-grouping them into bigger chunks and categories that made sense.

I repeated this process for each of the files of coded data. As I did, I noted the frequency of specific codes in these excerpts and started to see patterns and themes in the data. Most outliers were set to the side as they were only mentioned briefly, or in isolation, and did not seem to be representative of a pattern or theme. However, some outlier information was still included in my findings when it seemed valuable and connected to the literature in some way. This entire process was repeated twice, once for each set of class data.

Next, using the patterns and themes, I determined the most salient findings for each of the research questions. These points were presented in the form of two separate cases. To help paint a more detailed picture, the individual participant case summaries I had written earlier were integrated with relevant coded examples to add depth and description to each case. As I was constructing each case, I considered what the literature had to say about effective early reading instruction as I examined the students' perceptions on the topic. I focused on the themes I found in the literature (e.g. phonics, fluency, comprehension, etc.) and compared them to the themes I saw in the students' perceptions (e.g. accuracy, fluency, difficulty, etc.). Subsequently, I reviewed this information in relation to what each teacher believed and practiced with respect to

reading, describing similarities and differences. Through these two cases, I sought to describe

things that were observable, such as activities taking place during the reading period, as well as

things that were more subtle in nature, such as the classroom culture and the participants' beliefs

about reading.

This process was completed in its entirety for one class set, before moving on to the other

class set to help ensure I kept the cases distinct and gave each the concentrated focus it required.

Thus, at this point of analysis, I had two separate descriptive cases that detailed the teachers and

their beliefs and practical approaches to reading instruction, as well as the students' perceptions

about reading and themselves as readers.

Stage Four: Cross-Case Comparison

Finally, in the last phase of the analysis, I looked across cases to compare the students'

perceptions within the contexts of the different classrooms. To do this, I returned to my guiding

research questions, my individual participant summaries, and the two class cases I had

constructed. After reviewing these documents, I wrote new responses "answering" my guiding

research questions, using the patterns and themes I had uncovered as an outline. For example, I

started with the first research question that addressed students' views of "good" reading and their

perceptions of themselves as readers. Then I examined a particular theme (e.g. difficulty,

accuracy, fluency, etc.) and compared how the students' in each class responded. As I did this, I

noted relevant situations and examples from the data that supported my thoughts, while

attempting to allow the students' voices to speak for themselves. Moreover, I compared these

findings to the appropriate literature to determine which findings were supported by, or differed

from, the accepted discourse in the field. This process was repeated with each theme within a

research question and, subsequently, repeated with each of the three research questions that

guided this study. Hence, at the completion of my data analysis process, I had a comparison of

the similarities and difference between the two cases, which was also connected to the relevant

literature.

Validation of the Data

First, I utilized a research journal in an effort to provide organization and structure to the

research process, as well as providing a means of validating the data. In this journal, I recorded

my reflections on methods and decisions during the research process and memos to myself. As

discussed by Creswell and Miller (2000), this helped establish an "audit trail" that allows readers

to analyze both the process and the product of my research to help establish validity.

In addition, information was triangulated from data sources to help ensure the validity of

the obtained material. By gathering information and evidence from interviews, observations, and

various documents, this added to the strength of the fieldwork and the findings of my study

(Wolcott, 2001). For example, comparing the teachers' reflections during the interviews with the

TORP survey results and the classroom observations helped me see how closely they

corresponded in order to support the validity of the data. The triangulation of qualitative sources

(observations and interviews) was done to shed light on developing patterns or themes and to add

to the validation of the data. This method of "comparing observational data with interview data"

was completed to help ensure the consistency of my findings (Patton, 1990, p. 465). In general,

interview data was compared to classroom observation data, and documents such as lesson plans

and running records provided a means of cross-checking and validating that information further.

Finally, I created a basic report, or summary, of my key findings with respect to each

participant and research question that was maintained, and modified as appropriate, throughout

the analysis period. Finally, the findings were connected and compared to accepted discourse in

the field. Drawing on the work of Creswell (1998), wherever possible, I attempted to use the

words of the participants to help ensure validity and provide truth through their voice.

<div align="center">Summary of Methodology</div>

The purpose of this case study is to add to the current limited base of literature describing

second-graders' perceptions on reading and reading instruction. This qualitative study was

guided by a social constructivist framework and accessed the participants in their natural setting

so that this topic could be explored and described in detail, with the participants more likely to be

themselves (Creswell, 1998). After using a survey to gain a purposeful sample of classroom

teachers, a variety of data sources typical of a qualitative case study were used including

classroom documents, observations, and individual semi-structured interviews. Data was

carefully managed through organized paper documents and electronic files throughout the

collection and analysis process. Analysis took place in four layers including a preliminary

holistic analysis, detailed coding, and the construction and comparison of two cases.

Throughout the research process, a research journal was used to provide organization, structure,

and as a means of validating the data by documenting methods and decisions made.

Additionally, triangulation of data sources helped ensure validity as did using the words of the

participants wherever possible. The resulting findings are presented in descriptive cases in the

next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Somebody who is reading like really good and like fast and knows they are a great one

and the ones that read like slow but are still good spellers, those are good ones. (Student

interview, 6/15/11).

As presented in Chapter One, the purpose of this qualitative study is to add to the

literature by using a social constructivist framework to describe how second grade students feel

about reading and about themselves as readers, specifically in classrooms with teachers with

different theoretical orientations regarding early reading instruction. Assuming that reading is a

social interaction in which students make meaning based on both human interactions and from

the text, this study gives students an opportunity to voice their perceptions on this important

topic.

While the National Reading Panel (NRP) reviewed studies in areas the panel members

deemed critical (e.g., alphabetics, fluency, and comprehension, etc.), this case study is of two

classrooms and focuses on the students' perspectives of their reading instruction and how their

views relate to those of their classroom teachers (NICHD, 2000). As early readers, second-

graders are generally becoming independent readers and are in a unique position to be able to

reflect upon their experiences in becoming readers. While these students share perceptions that

are related to the components of the NRP report, they present distinct differences in the emphasis

they place on various aspects. Through observation and targeted student interviews, this case

study looks at this phenomenon in an attempt to illuminate students' views about reading and

themselves as readers.

In all, I interviewed two students from a high, medium, and low-level within each classroom, for a total of six students per classroom. This study used student participants from two different classrooms, both identified as "skills-based" theoretically, although one was closer to a phonics theoretical orientation and the other neared a whole-language orientation. Therefore, there were a total of 12 second-grade students in the study (see Ch.3, Tables 3 and 4). Through individual, semi-structured interviews, students from both class settings were asked about "good" reading and good readers. The term "good" was not defined as to leave it open to the interpretation of the participants. Moreover, students were asked about themselves as readers. For example, they were asked what their thoughts were on reading this year in school, how they learned to read, what kind of reader they are, and their goals for themselves as readers. The findings are presented separately by class in the following sections.

<div align="center">Mrs. N's Class</div>

Background

Mrs. N is a veteran teacher with a master's degree and over 20 years of teaching experience. She considers herself a "strong reading teacher" who learned to read in a very traditional, phonics-based way (interview, 6/13/11). She shares that she was "a strong reader phonetically" and explains that students in her "generation" were given "nonsense words" to decode phonetically as a "true indication whether or not we could read and we had those skills." Moreover, Mrs. N describes her childhood reading instruction as including a basal reader with short stories, workbooks, and SRA reading kits. She remembers being very self-monitoring and assumes the teacher did some sort of assessment to make sure students were being truthful and progressing. She has a sense that it was very "skills-driven," but reveals she liked the short stories and getting involved in a fairy tales unit. In becoming a teacher, Mrs. N relates that her

ideas about reading instruction have come from a "balanced" background, including her own

reading instruction, her college preparation, her colleagues, and her personal quest for new ideas

on the internet and through professional resources.

Mrs. N's Beliefs about Reading Instruction

During our interview, Mrs. N seems very open and secure in her current beliefs about

reading instruction. Her TORP score is a 71 indicating a skills theoretical orientation toward

reading instruction (a score of 66-110 is deemed a skills-based approach), but on the lower end

of the range, closer to a phonics orientation (0-65 designates a phonics-based approach).

Fittingly, Mrs. N shares that she believes phonics provides a foundation for reading and that it

should be taught like basic math facts with a similar emphasis and expectation that students

should master and become fluent in applying various phonics rules (interview, 6/13/11).

Although the Reading Workshop approach is new to her, Mrs. N states that she finds

value in the explicit instruction and modeling included in this approach and is beginning to feel

comfortable with this instructional model (interview, 6/13/11). However, she shares that she is

struggling with the notion of "conferencing" with students, particularly with having to take notes

on what she does with each of her students. Moreover, Mrs. N relates that she agrees with the

importance of students reading books that fit them, or "just-right" books, but is uncomfortable

with all the students reading different books of their choosing as she feels she does not really

know what they are reading. Hence, although not part of the Reading Workshop approach per

se, Mrs. N continues to pull small groups to do "round-robin" reading during which everyone is

reading and discussing the same book. "They like it and it gives me a lot of information." She

believes students are engaged, involved, and can help each other use strategies during this kind

of activity. Ultimately, she feels the current reading instruction is very "hit or miss" and would

like to see a newer version of a basal reader (interview, 6/13/11).

In addition, during our interview, Mrs. N shares her biggest priorities and concerns with

respect to her reading instruction. After completing running records using the district's

benchmark assessment program, she does share the "level" information with the students to help

them select books, but tries to stress that she is not so interested in this. One reason for the lack

of value on the notion of "level" is that Mrs. N believes that the levels indicated using the

assessment program do not match "real" books (interview, 6/13/11). Moreover, when students

go to the library, books are not arranged in levels. Rather, Mrs. N allows them to choose their

own naturally-written reading material. She is okay with students reading books on other levels

if they are interested and can pick it up and read it; then they "know what just right is." Finally,

Mrs. N has a personal belief that she wants to help students grow from where they are as readers

and, most importantly, that "they all leave my class reading…as readers." To this end, Mrs. N

makes her struggling readers a priority and tries to listen to them read more often, although she

acknowledges the strong readers want their opportunities, too.

The Reading Culture in the Classroom

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* simply defines "culture" as the beliefs or customs of a

particular group or "a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place."

(http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture). This section seeks to capture the essence

of that culture as it describes the relationships taking place in the classroom during periods of

reading instruction based on classroom observations and teacher and student interviews. When

Mrs. N's TORP survey is analyzed, her score of 71 indicates a skills-orientation, on the lower

end of the skills category, nearing the phonics category at 65. In general, this seems to "match"

what I learn about Mrs. N from our interview and classroom observations. However, the

students also play a large role in shaping the culture of the classroom during reading periods as

they interact with the teacher, books, and each other. See Table 7 for a summary of the

characteristics of the focus students from Mrs. N's class.

Table 7

Summary of Characteristics of Student Participants in Mrs. N's class (TORP Score of 71)

Name	Gender	Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Level (M = Standard for June assessments)	Position in Class (High, Medium, Low)
Christian	Male	Q	High
Abby	Female	O	High
Matteo	Male	N	Middle
Zyaira	Female	N	Middle
Bradan	Male	L	Low
James	Male	J	Low

Note. TORP Score Scale: 0-65 = Phonics orientation, 66-110 = Skills-based orientation, 111-140 = Whole-language orientation. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Level for Grade 2 students at this point in the year is Level M. A typical Grade 2 student generally moves from approximately Level I/J/K in September to Level M by June.

Accuracy. The theme of accuracy, or "getting the words right," is first derived from the relevant literature, but is also evident in teacher and student interviews as the participants discuss good reading and good readers. Comments with any of the following codes are included in this grouping: using strategies to figure out words (e.g. skipping a word and going back to it, looking for little words inside of bigger words, looking for chunks such as –ed, -ing, etc.), sounding out words, or using spelling patterns to decode words.

Through her interview as well as her TORP survey, Mrs. N indicates her belief about the importance of phonics in reading instruction. Mrs. N states, "I think that's a foundation. I think we really should be teaching it…just like knowing our math facts. It is a basic foundation," (interview, 6/13/11). She provides examples of the 'magic e' and 'double vowels' phonics rules that she believes all second graders should know and be able to apply to decode unknown words. Furthermore, she shares her belief that she does not like to introduce new vocabulary specifically to students before reading a story; she wants them to use strategies to decode words on their own. And, while Mrs. N allows students to choose their own naturally-written reading material rather than using controlled texts, she seems to place more emphasis on accuracy and less emphasis on the importance of meaning in reading instruction, similar to the students' responses in our interviews (interview, 6/13/11).

This emphasis on using phonics as a decoding strategy and sounding out is also clear in my interviews with students. When talking about accuracy, or figuring out unknown words, students at all levels mention using strategies such as sounding out, chunking, or breaking words into parts. Moreover, these seem to be the strategies that children in this class rely on most heavily. For example, James explains that he would try to sound out a word and, if he could not, his mom or dad would help him break up the word (interview, 6/14/11). Similarly, Zyaira

indicates she would ask her older sister or her mom for help with words. They tell her to sound

out the words or tells her to "break pieces of the words and then put them all together,"

(interview, 6/16/11). Matteo also shares that he would "break up the word and sound both parts

out." If that was not successful, he was asked if he would do anything else. "No…not really,"

he replies (interview, 6/15/11). Similarly, after sharing how she finds "chunks of the word that I

know" and then sounds letters out individually, Abby was asked if there was anything else she

would do to which she also replied, "Well…not really" (interview, 6/17/11). Hence, this

emphasis on phonics strategies to decode appears to be equally represented in Mrs. N's beliefs

and practices, as well as those of the students in her class.

Similarly, on the TORP, one indication of a phonics theoretical orientation is a "teacher

correcting students immediately after an oral reading mistake" (DeFord, 1985). In her TORP

response, Mrs. N did not strongly agree or disagree with this indicator and during our

conversation, Mrs. N did not discuss correcting students' oral reading mistakes. Nonetheless,

during one observation, a student said, "Me and Courtney…" at which point Mrs. N immediately

interjected, "Courtney and I…" indicating a similar level of correction (observation, 6/16/11).

More observable, however, are students interacting and immediately correcting themselves and

each other during oral reading. For example, during one classroom observation, Zyaira and

Abby are reading *Charlotte's Web* aloud together, taking turns going page by page. When Abby

mistakenly reads "took a axe," Zyaira immediately corrects her, "ahold of an axe" (observation,

6/13/11). A little later on, when Abby reads "his sneakers" instead of "her sneakers," she

immediately self-corrects, while Zyaira is correcting her at the same time. Hence, this insistence

on accuracy seems to be important, particularly to the students in this class.

The students also use the concept of accuracy as an indicator of good reading and good readers. For example, Zyaira identifies her dad as a good reader because she spends time with him reading the papers he has on the dining room table and, when she asks him about a really long word, he has no trouble helping her with it. Similarly, after identifying a specific classmate as a good reader and being asked how she came to that conclusion, Zyaira explains, "Because she usually never messes up on a word," (interview, 6/16/11). Not surprisingly, when asked about her own goals for herself as a reader, Zyaira indicates that she should be better at reading. When probed further about how she could be a better reader, she explains that she hopes to get more words right and not less (interview, 6/16/11).

Overall, through discussion, it seems that accuracy is a critical component of good reading to these students. They believe that good readers do not have trouble figuring out words and talk about how good readers "get the words right," just as Henk and Melnick found that fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students noticed classmates' accuracy when reading aloud (Henk & Melnick, 1998). Furthermore, the relationship between the beliefs and practices of Mrs. N and her students' understanding of reading appears to be quite analogous in this area. The emphasis Mrs. N puts on phonics and the ability for students to decode unknown words seems to be reflected in the students' understanding of good reading and good readers.

Fluency. Another code taken from the NRP report is "fluency." This code is applied to any mention of reading with a sense of speed and smoothness, and/or expression. While Mrs. N considers fluency as an important part of reading instruction, the students in her class appear to emphasize it much more heavily. In our interview, Mrs. N only mentions that fluency should be part of Readers Workshop and good reading instruction without going into much depth. On the other hand, many of the students discuss fluency in more detail and seeming importance.

First, the students are able to demonstrate an understanding of fluency by both explaining the term and by providing examples of fluent and non-fluent reading. For instance, during our interviews, students share original examples of fluent reading by reading and/or speaking smoothly with an appropriate pace. Then they typically follow with a contrasting example of reading without fluency to provide a comparison and illustrate the difference. When demonstrating fluent reading, their words flow smoothly with few, if any, pauses. Additionally, through student interviews, students discuss fluency as reading with expression and attending to punctuation (e.g., using an excited voice when appropriate, pausing to build suspense, etc.).

Clearly, the students in Mrs. N's class believe that fluency is a component of good reading. In this class, Bradan and Matteo both talk about how "fluency" is a part of good reading. For example, Matteo indicates that good readers, such as his friend Adam from class, read "fast and fluently and with expression," (interview, 6/15/11) and Bradan explains that his buddy, Christian, is a good reader because, "He is really like good and he is really fluent," (interview, 6/16/11). Zyaira puts it this way: "Good reading is a person who reads fluently. They take their time. They don't rush and they probably just read with excitement. Like whatever reaction the character is in they should do the same reaction," (interview, 6/16/11). James gives a similar example and explains fluency "like a big expression and like you stop so that when you read you like get big suspense…" (interview, 6/14/11).

Moreover, four of the focus students in this class talk about fluency as part of their reading goals for themselves for the school year. Christian, for example, states that he was not such a good reader in first grade because it probably took him about four minutes to read a page and, now, he thinks he's a good reader because he reads fluently (interview, 6/16/11). Similarly,

Bradan and Matteo share that they had been working on reading more fluently this year (interviews, 6/15/11).

Hence, the amount of detail and description the students in this class use when discussing fluency seems inharmonious with the little emphasis Mrs. N uses when discussing fluency as part of reading instruction during our interview. These second-graders demonstrate an awareness of fluency as an "observable" component of good reading. They recognize the difference between fluent and non-fluent reading and strive to read more smoothly and with expression. This focus on observable factors is supported by various studies that found students, in general, seem to overemphasize the public aspects of reading (Henk & Melnick, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Tancock, 1997). Although the participants did not articulate it, each of these characteristics is observable during regular instructional activities that take place within the classroom.

Difficulty. When the students in Mrs. N's class speak about good reading and good readers, many of their responses fall into the category of difficulty. The term difficulty is applied to the mention of reading hard or long words, books with lots of pages or many chapters, or higher or advanced levels. Overwhelmingly, however, the specific difficulty indicator referenced by students in both classes is "level." As previously described, students in this district are assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to find their independent reading level; many students are provided with this level in order to help them select "just-right" books for independent reading.

In her interview, Mrs. N stresses that it is important to her to help readers grow from where they are in addition to the idea that students leave her class as readers. Although she uses the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System and "levels" her students according to

the difficulty of text that they can read with independence, Mrs. N states, "I don't think the level matters," (interview, 6/13/11). Furthermore, when identifying and discussing the good readers in her class, she explains that although some students read at a higher level, they may sometimes just read the words, and do not read between the lines to get the message of the story. Yet, some of the children that may not be considered on level are "wonderful critical thinkers…they have the potential…"

In general, the students in Mrs. N's class appear to find the level of difficulty much more important than Mrs. N indicates it is in her mind. There is a disparity as the students focus much more intently on the difficulty of books and their corresponding "levels." They talk about books, themselves as readers, and other classmates in terms of the levels of the books, the number of pages or chapters, or being easy or advanced (student interviews, 6/14 – 6/17/11).

First, the students refer to the level of a student's reading book as an indicator of a good reader. In Mrs. N's class, when asked how he could tell if someone was a good reader, Bradan responds that he would "see the letter on their book," (interview, 6/15/11). When asked what letter determines a good reader, he shares the name of another child in the class whom he identified as a good reader reading an "N" book. Through follow-up questions, it is determined that Bradan has specific benchmark levels for good readers in mind, but he is unable to explain his thinking further. To him, a good reader has to be reading at least level K books. On the other hand, another child in the same class indicates the movement and advancing up through levels as being important, rather than identifying a particular benchmark that indicates someone is a good reader (interview, 6/16/11).

Next, Christian identifies his parents as good readers who read "books with really hard words (interview, 6/16/11)," and Matteo identifies himself as a good reader because he is reading

an "advanced book." When asked to explain what made it advanced, Matteo describes the

difference between a *Dora* book with only three or five pages, and his *Boxcar Children* book

with one hundred and fifty-four pages. When I comment, "That's a lot of pages," Matteo

proudly smiles and nods with a resounding, "Yup!" (interview, 6/15/11).

        Moreover, when referring to themselves as readers, students in Mrs. N's class refer to

some aspect of difficulty in a way that deems it important unto itself. For instance, while other

factors such as interest may be at play, many students pinpoint "level" as a critical factor in the

books they choose to read. In his interview, Matteo states the he chooses his books based on

their level (interview, 6/15/11). In another example, Zyaira describes herself as a Level M

reader and talks about how she improved and her level "got higher and higher and I started to go

on like different levels," (interview, 6/16/11). Similarly, when I interviewed Christian, the

concept of difficulty comes up as part of his response to a variety of questions. For instance,

Christian indicates he reads chapter books with a lot of pages and talks about how fast he could

read them. In addition, he shares that he selects mostly chapter books because "I am just on that

level" and thinks they are fun because of all the pages (interview, 6/16/11).

        The idea of difficulty in terms of levels seems to affect students' perceptions of

themselves as readers and influences the goals they set for themselves as readers. Bradan and

James, described as low-level readers within their class, speak about books at specific levels as

being too hard or too easy (interviews, 6/15/11). Bradan elaborates that he likes the idea that

reading is challenging for him this year, but also shares that he does not like that "really I am not

a good reader so I really can't…some books I think are interesting but they are too high level for

me," (interview, 6/15/11). Hence, it seems that, while interest is a motivator and plays a role in

Bradan's book selection process, the concept of level and difficulty is an obstacle that keeps him from those books that interest him, at least for the time-being.

Correspondingly then, many of the students refer to difficulty when discussing their goals for themselves as readers. Zyaira is very specific when she shares her goal of wanting to get better at reading "long words, really long words that have about probably fifteen letters," (interviews, 6/16/11). Two other students identified as high-readers within the classroom share a reference to difficulty in articulating their reading goals for themselves. For example, Abby says she wants to read bigger books that are thicker than the ones she currently has in the classroom (interview, 6/17/11). Similarly, Christian says he is trying to get better at "levels…like Level P, stuff like that," and, when he thinks about what books to read next, he considers "harder books…bigger books and smaller words and much more words (interview, 6/16/11)". This notion seems to contradict Mrs. N's belief that "levels don't matter (interview, 6/13/11)."

Interestingly, James, identified as a low-level reader within his class, appears to have an inflated sense of himself as a reader as compared to the teacher and assessment data. Specifically, according to his Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, James' independent reading level is a J. However, he calls the *Henry and Mudge* books "way too easy," although they would seem to fit his independent reading level. Moreover, James has made it a goal this year to "get up to a higher level" as he shared in our interview. When asked about his progress, he responds, "I think I am doing it except not just done yet," (interview, 6/14/11). As Dweck (2002) describes, younger students often transition in their thinking and begin to use social norms to evaluate their own performance, but may still tend to think in terms of success or failure with a task. Therefore, James' self-perceptions may not be as accurate as he may be more unaware of the standards or norms in the classroom, and may be relying on more of a sense of

success versus failure. Or, alternatively, he may be very aware of the social norms in the class, and uses such statements to detract from his true abilities and challenges with respect to reading. Such perceptions will be explored further in the next chapter.

However, this view of themselves as readers is congruent with the studies that also found children's frequent identification of themselves as readers based on their reading levels (Hall & Myers, 1998; Pierce, 1999). The students in this case study tend to talk about themselves as readers in connection to a "level" of reading, despite Mrs. N trying to downplay the importance of reading levels. In fact, Mrs. N explicitly gives students permission to read texts that are not at their level provided the students have an interest in the subject and can understand what they are reading. Yet, just as Pierce (1999) found in her action research study, the students still placed an increased importance on the level of the books as compared to the teacher.

Interest. In our interview, Mrs. N mentions, seemingly in a positive manner, that she has students who do not want to put down a book. It is interesting to note, however, that fostering interest in reading or a love of reading is not something she discusses as an aspect of good reading instruction (interview, 6/13/11). Yet, students in her class still indicate great interest in reading, particularly with respect to different series of books.

Throughout our discussions, a number of students identify a particular series they enjoy or share that they select independent reading books based on interest. As previously described, Bradan is very interested in reading particular books, "but they are too high level for me," (interview, 6/15/11). Matteo thinks it is wise to find a good book at the beginning of a series, so once you finish the book, you can continue reading the series and attributes this bit of knowledge directly to Mrs. N (interview, 6/15/11). In our interview, when explaining why he likes reading self-described "advanced" books, he explains, "Because it's like…Mrs. N says…try and pick a

chapter book that will hold your interest." He further explains how the first chapter book in a series would help him know "to go after the series." Hence, enjoying and finding interest in books and reading seem to be a natural part of the reading process to the students in Mrs. N's class, despite the fact that she did not articulate this as one of her core beliefs about good reading instruction during our interview or classroom observations.

Furthermore, students use this interest in a book/series as a descriptor when talking about themselves as readers. For instance, Christian describes himself reading books that make him laugh and being involved with the *Pokémon* series. He also discusses liking mysteries and reading the *Cam Jansen* series with a classmate (interview, 6/16/11). Similarly, Matteo holds his teacher's advice to "try and pick a chapter book that will hold your interest" in high regard. He has two labels for himself as a reader based on his interest in a book. Matteo says he is an "okay reader" when he reads the first page of a book and it does not interest him, and a "good reader" when he is interested in a book right away (interview, 6/15/11). Hence, the students in Mrs. N's class consider interest in a book or series as part of the reading process and when viewing themselves as readers.

Reading as a social process. In Mrs. N's class, reading is a social time. Students may choose where to read and can often be observed reading in partnerships, working together and discussing their books (observations, 6/13/11, 6/15/11, and 6/16/11). Mrs. N shares that she sees value in allowing and encouraging students to work together and help each other (interview, 6/13/11). In fact, two of the goals she had set for herself included encouraging more partnership reading and being okay with the hum of noise that comes with students working together (she had been accustomed to the classroom being silent during reading time to allow students to focus).

In this class, it is common for students to work together to help each other and/or discuss their reading during each of the classroom observations (6/13/11, 6/15/11, and 6/16/11). For example, when two boys are stuck on the word "politely," one suggests sounding it out. When that is unsuccessful after a few attempts, the other boy tries to continue reading and then go back to the unknown word. Finally, both boys conclude it must be a "name" that they would just not be able to figure out and decide to move on (observation, 6/13/11). Similarly, in interviews when students are asked which classmate they would choose as a partner, a reason that is provided is that the person could help them figure out words (student interviews, 6/15/11).

Social comparison. Another impression that emerges from the data involves social comparison. This notion comes from student responses in which they indicate they are judging themselves as readers in comparison with someone else or are basing their opinions on another person's judgment of them. For example, Bradan, identified as a low-level reader within the class, says he would pick another boy named Kyle from the class to be his reading partner because "we are both not the best readers in the class and we both help each other out," (interview, 6/15/11). He goes on to discuss how they help each other because "sometimes we don't know words a lot." According to Bradan, Kyle does not know hard words, while he, himself, sometimes does. He further elaborates that sometimes concentrating on the hard words or simply knowing them gives him so much confidence that he forgets the short words, and then Kyle helps him. Hence, Bradan uses this social comparison to help him meet his reading needs; this comparison helps him determine what he is good at and identify someone whom he can comfortably work with to gain the assistance he feels he needs.

Next, Matteo, a middle-level reader within the class, also seems to use social comparison when asked whom he would choose as a reading partner within the class. After naming two

friends, he explains his reasoning. He replies, "Ben is a really really good reader just like

me…like we are kind of even." Matteo further clarifies by explaining that the other child,

Adam, is smarter than both he and Ben and would likely choose books that are too hard for them

to read. "Ben, he is like my level. We read *Magic Treehouse* but he doesn't read *Boxcar*

Children." Matteo goes on to report that he and Ben are interested in the same books now, while

Adam was on that level in first grade and kindergarten, "so it makes Adam kind of advanced and

Ben kind of my level." Hence, Matteo feels those two boys would serve his interests best as

reading partners, based on his comparison of his reading abilities with theirs. Along the same

line, Matteo volunteers two strategies he could offer someone who is having trouble reading,

provided he is a better or equal reader to the person having trouble (interview, 6/15/11).

Finally, Abby, a high-level reader within the class, shares some thoughts that reference

the notion of social comparison. First, she volunteers that she would choose her friend Meghan

as a reading partner because they are both on the same level and like the same things. Another

example of Abby using social comparison comes to light when Abby is asked what kind of

reader she thought herself. She replies, "I think I am an excellent reader. I think I am one of the

best ones in the class, not to brag or anything," indicating a use of social comparison to her peers

in order to evaluate her own abilities (interview, 6/17/11).

This notion of social comparison can be connected to self-concept research. As Bong

and Clark (1999) explained, self-concept tends to be descriptive and evaluative in nature while

also including feelings of self-worth. Furthermore, they described self-concept as incorporating

an approval or disapproval of self after comparing one's ability to a standard or norm. This idea

can be applied to the students in this study as they often describe themselves as readers in

relation to the "standards or norms" within the classroom.

Competition. While the notion of students using social comparison to evaluate their own abilities is congruent with self-concept research, my observation and interviews also shed light on some competition resulting from those comparisons. During a classroom observation, I notice Matteo reading intently during a mini-lesson in which the other students appear to be focusing on listening to the teacher and/or haphazardly flipping through their books on the carpet. When I ask him about being the only child intently focused on reading his book during that time, he shares that he was "so ahead of Luke, he was on 29 and I was on 65 and so Luke was like flipping through his book to try to catch up to me," (observation and interview, 6/15/11). During further conversation about this situation, Matteo claims he wants to keep reading because he left off at an interesting part, however, he also acknowledges wanting to stay ahead of Luke. Additionally, when asked about her goals for herself as a reader, Abby indicates that she wants to be a better reader than her brother in third grade. Her logic was that "he has been reading longer than I have been and I am more like on a Q or an R and he is on S or T so I really want to catch up to him on reading," (interview, 6/17/11).

Summary. Thus, second-graders in Mrs. N's class have some interesting ideas about what they consider good reading and about themselves as readers. Moreover, there are some common elements to "good" reading as perceived by the various stakeholders. The NRP's review of relevant research provides common themes and codes for this case study, particularly in the areas of decoding and fluency. Considering the importance of teaching decoding strategies, Mrs. N believes that phonics instruction provides a basic foundation for reading instruction (interview, 6/13/11). Consistently, the students in her class also stress the value of being able to decode and sound out words (observations, 6/13, 6/15, and 6/16/11). In this class, the students appear to demand accuracy in decoding from themselves and classmates. They

believe good readers "get the words right," just as Henk and Melnick found that fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students noticed classmates' accuracy when reading aloud (Henk & Melnick, 1998).

Moreover, each student also refers to the concept of difficulty in some way (e.g. good readers can read hard or long words or books with lots of pages). More extensive, however, is the notion of "levels" as an indicator of difficulty and good reading; good readers read higher level books. Furthermore, the idea of levels colors how students see themselves as readers and, correspondingly, influences the goals they set for themselves as readers. In addition, students in Mrs. N's class are particularly adept at articulating their thoughts about fluency and demonstrating the difference between fluent and non-fluent reading. Again, these concepts also influence the goals they set for themselves as readers. The students discuss their interest in, and enjoyment of, a particular book or series when they are talking about themselves as readers, although this is not necessarily connected to the notion of good reading from their perspective. Lastly, the idea of social comparison arises in my interviews; students indicate that they are judging themselves as readers in comparison with someone else or based on another person's judgment of them.

As this study is primarily intended to uncover students' perceptions of good reading and of themselves as readers, the following key points are gleaned from the students in Mrs. N's class:

- The ability to decode unknown words is critical and "sounding out" words is a preferred strategy.

- To be considered a good reader, students demand accuracy from themselves and others.

- Fluency (e.g. reading quickly, smoothly, and with expression) is an important, observable component of good reading to students.

- The difficulty of text (e.g. level, number of pages, chapters, etc.) is a means of evaluating oneself as a reader. Good readers are on higher levels.

- Reading is a social process for these students. They work together to problem-solve and eagerly discuss what they are reading. The observable nature of this work helps them use the relevant information to make social comparisons, evaluating their abilities against the "norms" in the classroom.

- These students are interested and engaged as active participants in their reading instruction. They speak positively about their interest in particular books and/or series, indicate excitement for future reading selections, and set goals for themselves as readers based on personal achievements they want to make (e.g. read books with a certain amount of pages or at a certain level) or an interest in reading certain content.

<div align="center">Mrs. C's Class</div>

Background

Mrs. C is a teacher with over 15 years of experience teaching young elementary children. She considers herself "a good reading teacher" and feels like she knows "how to teach kids how to read…that's what I do," (interview, 6/10/11). Mrs. C shares that she learned to read with a basal reader program and remembers that she "hated reading." "The stories were terrible," she explains as she describes her childhood reading program as having no variety, no meaning, and being boring. She recounts how there were reading groups that met at a table with the teacher.

"Then you would just go around the table and everybody reads and I would just read ahead to make sure I knew what I was reading."

When she first became a teacher, Mrs. C shares that she taught first grade in more of an urban school. She remembers it being "whole language back then" and the focus was on giving children the opportunities to read appropriately-leveled books (interview, 6/10/11). She explains, "It all depends upon having access to materials that they can read and give them the opportunity to read those and giving them the skills they need to read those." It seems that Mrs. C was very influenced by this approach during the four years she was there, including the time spent with college professors focused on literacy studies with her and the students in her class. When she describes good reading instruction, Mrs. C talks about skills and modeling, but stresses the time and opportunity to read and re-read "just-right" books. It is Mrs. C's belief that students best learn to read by "being immersed in literature that is on their level where they can feel successful."

She further explains that, although she devotes approximately 1 ½ hours to Reading Workshop, she often feels pressured to fit everything in due to the administrators' formulation of her class schedule. For example, Mrs. C shares that, although she does Word Study with her class, she does not get to do it the way she would want as it is scheduled for 20 minutes three times a week. Hence, there is a "hurry up and get this done" quality to the work. Similarly, she shares her concerns about read-alouds with her class. From what she learned during a period of outside professional development, Mrs. C tries to do a minimum of three read-alouds a day: one for a specific skill, one focused on writing, and one for fun. Yet, again she acknowledges that those times quickly get cut to fit everything in as directed (interview, 6/10/11).

When Mrs. C's TORP survey is analyzed, her score of 103 indicated a skills-orientation, on the higher end of the skills category, nearing the whole language category at 111. In general, this seems to "match" what I learn about Mrs. C from our interview and classroom observations. Furthermore, there appears to be an overall connection between this teacher's beliefs and practices and the students' understanding of reading. Through classroom observations and interviews with the students, there are a number of similarities in their understanding of reading that appear to connect with Mrs. C's beliefs and practices, with some differences in the areas of phonics, rereading, and difficulty/levels.

Mrs. C's Beliefs about Reading Instruction

Mrs. C shares that she believes her current reading instruction practices match her beliefs about reading instruction. "I teach the way I believe it should be taught, but I do have to pull in what needs to be done here," she added (interview, 6/10/11). First, Mrs. C stresses the importance of her belief in immersing students in literature and modeling effective reading for them. For example, Mrs. C believes the best way to increase students' fluency is to "keep rereading the same books over and over again…and modeling the expression," (interview, 6/10/11). Then, she explains that she works with students on modeling expression in small groups and "the more that they read a book, the better the expression becomes." To add to that, I witness Mrs. C modeling using different voices for character dialogue to teach "envisioning a character" during one of the classroom observations (observation, 6/16/11).

Next, when I ask about the skills second-graders need, Mrs. C calls them "all the basics," and gives examples of decoding and comprehension skills (interview, 6/10/11). As for sight words in particular, Mrs. C strongly believes that practice with flash card drills is unnecessary (TORP and interview, 6/10/11). While sight words "have a place in reading instruction," Mrs. C

would rather focus on this element in word study or by having students put these words in their personal dictionaries and be held responsible and accountable for spelling and reading them correctly. While she claims she has never done a lesson on sight words, they "do fabulous with them" as evidenced by the Fry list of sight words they get assessed on periodically throughout the year.

Mrs. C feels skills should not follow a scope and sequence per se, but be imbedded in everything (interview, 6/10/11). According to the TORP, Mrs. C strongly agrees that it is important to teach skills in relation to other skills. This is apparent in classroom observations when the class reviews strategies to decode words. These lessons result in an eclectic list of strategies that relate to phonics, skills, and whole language indicators. Moreover, students are not observed practicing skills in traditional workbooks or on worksheets; rather they are applying them as necessary to problem-solve and discuss their reading. For example, during classroom observations, I witness students using phonics rules to decode, making predictions about their reading, and citing evidence for their opinions, all while making decisions about their reading material (observations, 6/13 – 6/16/11). Hence, the students in this class seem to mirror Mrs. C's belief and understand reading as involving a variety of skills and approaches to be used interchangeably as necessary.

Mrs. C has some strong beliefs about how phonics should be integrated into effective reading instruction. In this area, Mrs. C states that she does not believe in teaching phonics rules in isolation, but rather in a more natural manner as opportunities arise in decoding words (interview, 6/10/11). Yet, she shares that she does teach specific phonics rules and encourages the students to sound words out according to parts; however, she relates that she more often encourages them to think about what makes sense first and then turn to phonics to help decode

the word. I witness this notion in my classroom observations, as well. For example, during a mini-lesson reviewing decoding strategies, the student-led list includes ideas such as think about what makes sense, look at pictures, think of a rhyming word, check for understanding, sound it out, and flip the sound, among others (observation, 6/13/11). Immediately, after reviewing a multitude of strategies, Mrs. C asks the class, "What's your go-to strategy?" Without pausing, she shares how she first thinks about what makes sense, before asking the students to turn and talk about their 'go-to' strategy. Later that same period, in a conference with a child who appears to be stuck decoding a word, Mrs. C guides her to think about what would make sense there as an initial remedy.

In addition, Mrs. C talks about the importance of rereading books to increase fluency because "the more that they read a book the better their expression becomes," (interview, 6/10/11). When asked to explain how she encourages students to reread, Mrs. C says it has not been a problem; in fact, she has to push students, especially the lower level readers, to change the books in their book bags, as they tend to keep rereading the same ones. Yet, not one student mentions rereading in any of our interviews. Furthermore, the only evidence of rereading I notice during an observation was when a little boy stops reading independently and goes to get a drink from the water fountain. When he seems to linger there, I ask him what he is doing, to which he replies, "I'm done. I just read this two times (book in hand). I'm taking a break," (observation, 6/13/11). Thus, although Mrs. C indicates rereading as an important component of reading instruction, the focus students in this study did not seem to place the same importance on it.

When I ask Mrs. C about the levels of the readers in her class, she sighs. She acknowledges that she knows her students show progress because they "flew through the levels,"

but also shares other evidence of good reading (interview, 6/13/11). When asked who she

thought were the good readers in her class, she responds, "I have lots of different good

readers…and for different reasons." She proceeds to give an example of a student who is a great

reader, loves to read, and will never put a book down, and then compares that student to a girl

who attends Basic Skills because she is a lower-level reader, yet also never puts a book down.

While acknowledging that the Basic Skills reader was not really "low," just lower within her

class, Mrs. C is proud of that student's enjoyment of reading and the fact that she understands

what she reads. From this perspective, Mrs. C considers her a good reader. Similarly, she gives

an example of a high-level reader who struggles because he wants to go to higher level books,

but his comprehension is not there. Hence, Mrs. C seems to understand the necessity for the list

of reading levels the district requires, however, she believes that there are other aspects of good

reading that are not emphasized.

Next, Mrs. C describes a number of skills she feels it necessary for second-graders to

learn including a variety of decoding strategies and comprehension skills. However, she is also

strong in her belief that skills should not be taught in isolation, but rather more naturally

imbedded in lessons and taught in relation to other skills. Moreover, Mrs. C shares that she

teaches students to focus on meaning and what makes sense before applying other decoding

strategies. Although she does not stress reading "levels" with her students, Mrs. C understands

that this information still seems to matter and influences students' understanding of good

reading. Finally, Mrs. C extols the positive impact of modeling good reading and the importance

of rereading, although it is unclear how this influences students' understanding of good reading

as there is little reference to these notions by the students.

The Reading Culture in the Classroom

As previously described, culture can be defined simply as the beliefs or customs of a particular group or "a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place." (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture). This section seeks to capture the essence of that culture as it describes the relationships taking place in the classroom during periods of reading instruction based on classroom observations and teacher and student interviews. When Mrs. C's TORP survey is analyzed, her score of 103 indicates a skills-orientation, categorized as ranging from approximately 66-110. Therefore, her score of 103 nears the whole-language range beginning at approximately 111, and there may be some overlap in theoretical beliefs between the two orientations. In general, this seems to "match" what I learn about Mrs. C from our interview and classroom observations. However, the students also play a large role in shaping the culture of the classroom during reading periods as they interact with the teacher, books, and each other. See Table 8 for a summary of the characteristics of the focus students from Mrs. C's class.

Table 8

Summary of Characteristics of Student Participants in Mrs. C's class (TORP Score of 103)

Name	Gender	Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Level (M = Standard for June assessments)	Position in Class (High, Medium, Low)
Mark	Male	Q	High
Lauren	Female	P	High
Nick	Male	O	Middle
Michela	Female	O	Middle
Finn	Male	M	Low
Erin	Female	M	Low

Note. TORP Score Scale: 0-65 = Phonics orientation, 66-110 = Skills-based orientation, 111-140 = Whole-language orientation. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Level for Grade 2 students at this point in the year is Level M. A typical Grade 2 student generally moves from approximately Level I/J/K in September to Level M by June.

Accuracy. When I ask about the skills second-graders need, Mrs. C calls them "all the basics," and gives examples of decoding and comprehension skills (interview, 6/10/11). Through my interviews and classroom observations, students specifically identify good readers and good reading as including accuracy, getting all the words right, and not stumbling over or taking time to figure out words (interviews, 6/14 – 6/17/11). For example, students mention not getting stuck on words and strategies such as sounding out or breaking words apart to decode words. Michela, for instance, talks about learning to sound out and read words beginning in kindergarten and identifies herself as a good reader "because I don't really have trouble sounding the words a lot" (interview, 6/16/11). In the same class, Nick also refers to strategies when discussing how he learned to read beginning in preschool and how he and other students can use them now to help when stuck on a word. Overall, though, Nick only emphasizes accuracy when specifically asked about strategies and how to help someone who is struggling as a reader (interview, 6/16/11).

Yet, there seems to be a bit of a difference between Mrs. C's beliefs and students' understanding of reading in the area of phonics. While Mrs. C's beliefs and actions indicate that she primarily stresses meaning-based decoding and problem-solving skills, many of the students reference more phonics-based strategies. During my student interviews when students are asked what they do when they get to an unknown word or how they would help someone else that was stuck, the readers reference strategies such as sounding out words, breaking words into parts, or flipping the sound to decode unknown words, especially at first (interviews, 6/14 and 6/16/11). This characteristic of students' understanding of reading is supported by the work of Reutzel and Sabey (1996) in their interview study with 36 first-graders. They found that while teacher orientations may influence students' thoughts about reading and themselves as readers, it did not

affect the students' use of reading strategies. This would seem to apply to the students in this

class who still readily offer more phonics-based strategies as their initial decoding methods,

despite their teacher's emphasis on using meaning-based cues. Yet, one child indicates "Good

reading is really knowing the book" and that would be accomplished by "knowing the words and

what they mean," indicating a notion of meaning being important, although he still articulates

both phonics-based and meaning-based strategies when discussing how he would decode

unknown words (interview, 6/17/11).

Fluency. Another component of good reading the students in this class reference is the

importance of "fluency" when reading aloud. In particular, one student, Finn, shares that he had

been working on fluency and is proud of the "special training for reading" he went to in the

beginning of the year that made him "get really good," (interview, 6/16/11). He shares that he

learned fluency there using a special phone that you talk into and hear your voice. When his

classroom teacher is asked about this "special training," she relays that he had gone for Basic

Skills Instruction earlier in the year, but had stopped attending when he began reading at grade

level standards. However, while Finn can articulate that good reading involves good fluency, he

is not really able to explain much about it. For example, when asked, "What is good reading?"

he responds, "Good fluency and you have to know all the sounds of the words." Similarly, after

identifying two classmates as good readers, he is asked how he came to that conclusion. His

explanation is, "I know why they are good readers like in their fluency they're good because they

have a lot high levels and when I hear them read they are really good," but is unable to provide

further explanation or clarification to either response (interview, 6/16/11).

Another student, Erin, shares that she knows if someone is doing good reading if they "do

expression," but does not use the term "fluency" (interview, 6/14/11). Similarly, Lauren

identifies how fast someone can read as being an indicator of good reading, but also does not use

the word "fluency" (interview, 6/17/11). Finally, Nick says he can tell if someone is doing good

reading by their fluency and comprehending. He further explains comprehending as

understanding, but explains fluency as getting words right, which is more appropriately

categorized as "accuracy" in this study (interview, 6/16/11). Hence, while there is some mention

of fluency and expression, it is only brief in nature; one particular child did not even define

fluency appropriately when he said, "fluency is words if you get them right," (interview,

6/16/11). Still, whether discussed in detail or not, the modeled message about fluency and

expression appears to be mirrored in the oral reading and partnerships. As I witness during

classroom observations, students seek to read with appropriate pacing and change their voices to

reflect different characters.

 Comprehension. Next, throughout the student interviews, a few students allude to

comprehension in bits and pieces, either by using the term or talking about knowing what words

mean. For example, Nick reports that he would like to get better at comprehending and thought

he could do so by practicing reading. When questioned further, he explains that comprehending

means understanding the story, but does not share any additional detail (interviews, 6/16/11).

 However, one student, Finn, talks more extensively about the idea. Finn is not a low-

level reader overall as his benchmark running record assessment indicates he is meeting grade-

level standards, however, he is identified as a bottom-third reader within his class. Of particular

interest in our interview is the portion when he is identifying and talking about good readers in

his class. He first mentions a boy named Mark as a good reader who read *Harry Potter*. Finn

indicates that Mark "understands the book of *Harry Potter*" and compares that child to himself in

this way, "I can read *Harry Potter* but I won't understand the words. You have to understand the

words," (interview, 6/16/11). A follow-up question asks Finn how he knows Mark understands the words to which he replies, "Because he always talks about it." In the same manner, Finn describes how he knows another student whom he identifies as a good reader understands what he is reading. Finn said, "Danny is always reading it out loud and he is like this word and we all don't know what it is and then he knows what it is and he understands it," (interview, 6/16/11). Hence, Finn is a student who appears to emphasize comprehension more than the others in our interviews.

Difficulty. As a whole, when asked about good reading in this class, readers of all levels mention difficulty in some form. Invariably, the students' notion of good readers includes students or siblings reading high levels of books (based on the district's Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System). First, Mark identifies all of his family members as good readers, and cites the levels of the books that they read as the reason. He talks about his sister Elizabeth being "like on Level V" and grabbing a book from his brother's room and starting to read it right away. Moreover, Erin and Michela identify other students in the class as good readers because they are on really high levels. In our interview, Michela elaborates that one is "because he is on a really high level…he reads all the time" and the other "it's the same thing…on one of the highest levels," (interview, 6/16/11). Interestingly, Finn is more judicious in his analysis. He stresses that he cannot really tell if someone in his class is a good reader because students do not often read aloud to others in the class. "I just can't assume that they are reading a high level book. You just might be looking at one page," (interview, 6/16/11).

In a connected fashion, the students in this class often reference difficulty, or levels, when they talk about their reading goals for themselves. Students in Mrs. C's class speak about wanting to move up levels, but often combine that notion with being interested in the books. For

example, Erin and Finn, both identified as low-level readers within the class, both label themselves as good readers. Each discusses wanting to move up levels, but also indicates their interest in the books at those higher levels. Moreover, Erin also shares that what she likes about reading is that she went up a few levels with the help of her teacher, and now she really loves reading because she can go anywhere in her life and visit different places through books (interview, 6/14/11). Likewise, Finn shares how he wants to get to higher levels, but would also be willing to read something lower than his level if it interested him (6/16/11). Finally, Mark, identified as a high-level reader, shares that he likes to read challenging books because they "grab" and interest him; however, he also shares that he takes books "from a higher level to get on a way higher level," (interview, 6/17/11). Hence, the students in Mrs. C's class talk about difficulty and level being important. They reference these ideas both in describing themselves as readers, as well as setting reading goals for themselves, although this often connects to their interest in reading a particular book or series.

Interest and time. Hence, another theme that emerges from the student interviews with this is class is the idea of being interested in reading and/or the amount of time readers spent reading. Although perhaps more minor of a finding when compared to accuracy and fluency, some students in this class clearly connect interest and time spent reading with being a good reader. While they did not go into a great deal of depth, it is refreshing to hear students mention good readers reading a lot, practicing, and being interested in what they read.

First, Michela plainly says good reading is "read all the time," (interview, 6/16/11). Next, after naming people they consider good readers, Lauren and Finn explain their decisions because the student they named "reads a lot in school" and "reads a lot of other stuff," (interviews, 6/16 and 6/17/11). Also in Mrs. C's class, Nick has some difficulty explaining good

reading at first, "Good reading is like…if you read a lot…good reading…you could just…good reading is just um...." but later when the question is supposedly posed from a first grader or kindergartner asking for a response, Nick confidently replies, "I would tell them if you could become a good reader by reading," (interview, 6/16/11) indicating an acknowledgement of the time and practice involved in becoming a good reader.

Moreover, as introduced above, students also refer to their interest in a book or series in some way when they discussing themselves as readers. For instance, Erin says reading is fun and talks about a couple different series in which she is interested. Likewise, Finn shows excitement when he shares that the class had won a contest that awarded them a lot more books, including the *Geronimo Stilton* series that he likes and Mark talks about how he gets really "in a book" and does not want to stop (interview, 6/17/11). Thus, many of the students in Mrs. C's class share an interest and excitement for reading in some way.

Reading as socialization. In Mrs. C's class, reading appears to be a means of socialization. Other than directing students to read in partnerships, I did not discuss or witness any explicit teaching or discussion about reading being a way to socialize and interact with peers, yet it clearly is in this class. For example, Michela discusses various series that she is reading and connects them with her love of reading, adding that she and her friends like to read together, and that she likes to see "what books they like too," (interview, 6/16/11). Furthermore, Nick discusses how he and his reading partner talk about whatever was happening in their chapter books and how he was interested in finding out what his partner thought about it and comparing their ideas (interview, 6/16/11).

There is still an element of social comparison as an evaluative component of reading that emerges from the data, however, there is no indication of a competitive nature to it. When asked

whom he would choose as a reading partner, Nick names another boy from the class because he considers the other boy a good reader "and so am I," (interview, 6/16/11). In addition, when Lauren was asked what kind of reader she considers herself, she replies, "a really good one" because "my friends always say it because when they are stuck on words they ask me to help them," (interview, 6/17/11). As previously stated, this notion of gaining information through social comparison is supported by the literature and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Summary. As described, the students in Mrs. C's class are able to articulate much of their thoughts about what good reading is and how they view themselves as readers. These students talk about the concept of accuracy and that good readers do not get stuck on words. Additionally, students name and/or describe strategies that good readers would have to help decode unknown words independently, particularly referencing phonics-based strategies. Interestingly, although students identify fluency as a component of good reading, they are not able to go into great detail or accurately describe what they mean by fluency. While a handful of students mention a tidbit or two about comprehension or understanding, Finn is an exception. He is able to go into much more detail about the importance of understanding what you read. The students in this class believe good readers read high-leveled books and, while students want to progress and advance levels, they often connect this to their interest and desire to read particular higher-level books. Of note, however, is the revelation that the students in this class recognize that good readers read a lot, practice their reading, and are interested in what they are reading. Finally, as in Mrs. N's class, these students also make statements indicating that they may be using social comparison as a means of evaluating themselves as readers, yet they also share insight into their understanding of reading as a means of socialization.

Based on the information the students in Mrs. C's class share, combined with classroom observations and the teacher interview, the following key points are gleaned about students' perceptions about good reading and themselves as readers:

- Although the teacher appears to strongly emphasize concentrating on meaning first before other strategies, the students largely refer to phonics strategies first and foremost.

- Good readers read with accuracy.

- The students can use a variety of skills to decode unknown words, problem-solve, and talk about their reading. This appears analogous with the teacher's belief that skills should not be taught or practiced in isolation, but rather connected to tasks and in relation to each other.

- The students can refer to fluency, but do not always use the term "fluency" or demonstrate an accurate understanding of the term. However, when observed reading, students still attempt to read in a fluid, smooth, expressive manner typically associated with fluent reading.

- Only one student goes into depth demonstrating his understanding of "comprehension" and its role in good reading.

- Students in this class are more apt to connect their ideas about difficulty or levels of books with their interest in reading those books.

- The students connect good reading and good readers with their interest in reading and the time they spent doing so.

- The students view reading as a means of socializing as they collaborate to read and discuss books.

Summary of the Findings

As described earlier, the purpose of this qualitative study is to add to the literature by

using a social constructivist framework to describe how second grade students feel about reading

and about themselves as readers, specifically in classrooms with teachers with different

theoretical orientations regarding early reading instruction. Hence, this chapter presents two

separate cases, illustrating how both the classroom teacher thinks about reading, as well as how

targeted groups of students perceive reading and their views of themselves as readers. While

there are definitely common themes that run through both classes, there are also distinct

differences and nuances that are more subtle.

This study focuses on six student participants from two different classrooms, for a total of

12 students. Although both classrooms are identified as "skills-based" theoretically, one is

closer to a phonics theoretical orientation and the other nears a whole-language orientation.

Through individual, semi-structured interviews, students from both class settings share their

thoughts about "good" reading and good readers (See Tables 5 and 6 for a summary of the

student participant characteristics.).

Through data analysis, a combination of codes from the relevant literature and those that

emerged from the data are applied. Common themes that emerge include: accuracy, fluency,

comprehension, difficulty, interest and time, and the notion of reading as a social process.

In many respects, students' understanding of reading seems to connect with, and be

analogous to, the beliefs and practices of their corresponding teachers. For instance, Mrs. N

believes a phonics foundation is important and her students are able to articulate and apply

various phonics strategies to decode unknown words. Moreover, Mrs. C's belief about modeling

fluency and expression is mirrored in her students' actions, although they are not always able to

articulate these ideas during our interviews. Yet, there are other areas in which the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices is not as synonymous with students' understanding of reading. While these results are not the same in each classroom, there is one difference that is evident in both class settings. Although both Mrs. N and Mrs. C attempt to dismiss the reading level as a minor component of their reading instruction and what constitutes a good reader, the students in both classes use these levels to describe good readers and good reading, themselves as readers, and to help set goals for themselves as readers. Additional similarities and differences can be seen in Table 9 and will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Table 9

Summary of Research Question Three Findings

Theme	Mrs. N's Class (skills-orientation leaning toward phonics)	Mrs. C's Class (skills-orientation leaning toward whole-language)
Difficulty: • Hard/long words • Length of book (pages or chapters) • Level of book	Students at all levels referenced difficulty; students identified aspects of difficulty as goals for themselves as readers (e.g. bigger books, harder words, higher levels)	Students at all levels referenced difficulty; students reported wanting to move up levels as readers but also connected it to their interest in higher level books
Accuracy: • Getting words right • Strategy use (e.g. sounding out, chunking, etc.)	Referenced at all levels; middle-level readers emphasized accuracy more than those in Mrs. C's class	Referenced at all levels; middle-level readers emphasized accuracy less than those in Mrs. N's class
Fluency: • Speed • Smoothness • Expression • Attending to punctuation	Referenced at all levels; more emphasis at the low and middle-levels compared to Mrs. C's class; more inclusion of fluency as a reading goal	Referenced at all levels; less emphasis at the low and middle-levels compared to Mrs. N's class; less explanation and detail when discussing fluency

Interest and time: • Reading a lot • Practicing • Being interested in books/series	No mention of good reading with respect to interest and time; discussed their interest in books/series when talking about self-perceptions	Connected good readers with interest and time; discussed their interest in books/series when talking about self-perceptions
Comprehension: • Knowing what words mean • Understanding	Mentioned in bits and pieces	Mentioned in bits and pieces; only one student discussed more in detail when talking about good reading
Social comparison: • Better/worse than others • Good/bad labels • Competition (pages, levels, etc.)	Did not come up in relation to good reading; more detailed social comparison responses than Mrs. C's students	Did not come up in relation to good reading; brief mention of social comparison with respect to self-perceptions as readers

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

It's a simple fact. If kids don't read, they're going to have a hard time getting through

high school. Kids who don't read a lot are falling behind in school, which means they

are likely to fall behind in life. I believe if you can turn a kid on to reading, you're saving

a life (Patterson, 2014, p. 216).

The importance of effective early reading instruction to the overall success of students is

paramount when the significance of literacy in all aspects of education is considered. The final

chapter of this dissertation discusses key findings, conclusions, and implications relevant to this

study. First, it provides a brief summary of the study including an overview of the problem, the

purpose of the study, its guiding research questions, and a general review of the methodology.

Next, it highlights the key findings and differences between the two cases in this study.

Afterward, it discusses the conclusions and implications for policy and practice in the field of

early reading instruction. Finally, the chapter closes with the limitations of the current study and

offers suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Study

As previously described, reading is a key component in all aspects of education and,

therefore, continues to remain an issue of national focus. While there is agreement about the

importance of effective early reading instruction, there is a wide-ranging body of information

and research that debates the topic from various angles, although little research has focused on

the students themselves and their points of view regarding their own education (Chapman,

Greenfield, & Rinaldi, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to add to the literature by describing how second-grade students feel about reading and about themselves as readers. A social constructivism framework is used to inform this study as reading is a social interaction in which students make meaning based on both human interactions and from the text. My goal is to shed light on this perspective in the hope of improving the effectiveness of reading instruction for all young learners.

To help focus and guide my research, the following questions were used:

1. Given two teachers with different theoretical orientations, yet the same practical approach to reading instruction, what do second grade students think is "good" reading and how do they view themselves as readers?

2. What is the relationship, if any, between teachers' beliefs and practices and students' understanding of reading?

3. Given the two teachers' different beliefs about reading, how do students respond differentially in these contexts?

This qualitative case study is set in two second-grade classrooms in a primary school in an affluent suburban town in central New Jersey. Using the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), the two teachers with the most disparate scores were selected, although both were identified as being within the skills orientation. Another purposeful sample of six students was selected from each classroom, for a total of 12 second-grade students. A summary of the student participants from each class can be found in Chapter 3, Tables 2 and 3.

Data collection primarily included typical classroom documents such as reading assessments and lesson plans, observations, and individual semi-structured interviews. Three observations of each classroom were conducted during a Reading Workshop period, each lasting approximately 30-45 minutes and guided by an observation protocol (Appendix D). Similarly,

structured protocols were also used to guide the interviews (see Appendices E and F); each

teacher interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and the one-on-one student interviews each

took about 10 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, electronically stored, and later

transcribed separately.

Data analysis took place in four stages. The first stage was a preliminary one in which I

read through every piece of data in its entirety, multiple times, to get a better sense of what I had

in front of me. I wrote overall case summaries of my impressions for each participant before

going back to the data and beginning to sort and categorize it according to research question.

The next stage of analysis involved looking at the data in a more individualistic manner and

coding and re-coding it using both deductive and inductive codes. The third stage was, again,

more holistic in nature as I used the data to find patterns and themes that led to my findings

presented in the form of two cases. Finally, the last stage of analysis consisted of a cross-case

comparison. The key differences in these findings will be discussed in the next section.

<div align="center">Key Differences Between the Classrooms</div>

In many respects, the reading instruction, teacher beliefs, and student perceptions are

quite similar between the two classrooms. Both teachers basically utilize the same mini-lessons

during reading workshop and follow the same district-mandated Reading Workshop approach to

teaching reading (e.g. mini-lesson, guided practice, independent practice, conference, etc.).

Without doubt, each teacher's beliefs about effective reading instruction are anchored to her

personal history and experience, an idea that is supported by the research of Deal and White

(2006) and Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd (1997). Furthermore, each teacher is attempting to meet

the needs of her students in what she believes is the best way given the circumstances (e.g. time

limits, district mandates, etc.).

Moreover, the students in both classes reference the notions of accuracy, fluency, and difficulty in similar ways as they describe good readers and good reading, themselves as readers, and set goals for themselves as readers. This is supported by various studies that found students, in general, seem to overemphasize the public aspects of reading (Henk & Melnick, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Tancock, 1997). These students believe that good readers do not have trouble figuring out words and can read smoothly and/or quickly. Although the participants do not articulate it, each of these characteristics is observable during the regular instructional activities that take place within the classroom.

Yet, there are key differences in what the students emphasize as they discuss their views of reading and becoming readers. In general, the students in Mrs. N's class appear to stress accuracy, fluency, and difficulty more than their counterparts in Mrs. C's class. On the other hand, the students in Mrs. C's class connect the notion of interest and time with good readers, and one student discusses comprehension in relation to good reading with some level of detail and understanding. The most salient difference, however, is the emphasis the students place on aspects of social comparison. A comparison of the students' responses according to theme can be viewed in Table 10 at the end of this section. Next, the differences between these two classrooms will be explored in further detail.

Accuracy, Fluency, and Difficulty

Although students in both classes reference accuracy, fluency, and difficulty in their conversations about good reading and good readers, the students in Mrs. N's class seem to have an increased emphasis on these areas compared to their counterparts in the other class. The students in Mrs. N's class believe that, to be a good reader, accuracy is a necessary factor. This can be seen in the automaticity and frequency in the level of correction in Mrs. N's class.

Although this is not an area Mrs. N discusses as an important part of reading instruction, her

students were observed immediately correcting themselves and each other during oral reading.

For example, when Abby read "his sneakers" instead of "her sneakers," she immediately self-

corrected, while her reading partner was correcting her at the same time (observation, 6/13/11).

Hence, accuracy is a critical component to good reading to the students in this class and they do

their best to insist on it.

With respect to accuracy, the ability to decode unknown words is essential to good

reading and "sounding out" words is a preferred strategy. Students at all levels mention using

phonics-based strategies such as sounding out, chunking, or breaking words into parts and

indicate that they are the strategies they rely on most heavily. In general, students in Mrs. N's

class could share one phonics-related decoding strategy they would try and, if unsuccessful, they

were basically stuck or would turn to someone for assistance. Hence, an emphasis on the use of

phonics strategies to decode appears to be equally represented in Mrs. N's beliefs and practices,

as well as those of the students in her class.

In this case study, Mrs. N focuses on the importance of teaching particular skills or parts

of reading, particularly emphasizing accuracy (observations and interviews, 6/2011). Similarly,

the students in Mrs. N's class also emphasize accuracy and fluency and are quite adept at

explaining the concepts, particularly fluency. And, while Mrs. N allows students to choose their

own naturally-written reading material rather than using controlled texts, she seems to place

more emphasis on accuracy and less emphasis on the importance of meaning in reading

instruction, similar to the students' responses in our interviews (interview, 6/13/11).

Similarly, in Mrs. C's class, it appears to be an accepted fact among the students that

good readers read with accuracy. Although this teacher appears to strongly emphasize

concentrating on meaning first before other strategies, her students still largely refer to phonics

strategies first and foremost. However, while students may prioritize the use of phonics

strategies, it appears that most of the students are able to use a variety of skills interchangeably to

decode unknown words, problem-solve, and talk about their reading. This is a notable difference

from the seeming over-reliance on phonics-based strategies by the students in Mrs. N's class.

Yet, it also appears analogous with Mrs. C's belief that skills should not be taught or practiced in

isolation, but rather connected to tasks and in relation to each other.

Furthermore, students in both classes appear to consider the difficulty of the text (e.g.

level, number of pages, chapters, etc.) to be much more important than the teacher. Students use

the notion of difficulty as a means of evaluating oneself as a reader; good readers are on higher

levels. Although students from both classes talk about wanting to move up levels, those in Mrs.

N's class appear to want to advance levels simply to achieve progress. On the other hand, the

students in Mrs. C's class seem more apt to connect this concept to their interest in reading those

higher-level books, rather than referring to it as a goal unto itself.

Interest, Time, and Comprehension

Students in both classes display an interest in reading. They speak positively about their

interest in particular books and/or series, indicate excitement for future reading selections, and

set goals for themselves as readers based on personal achievements they want to make (e.g. read

books with a certain amount of pages or at a certain level) or an interest in reading certain

content. However, the students in Mrs. C's class appear to see a connection between good

reading and interest and time. They indicate an awareness of a relationship between good

readers and an interest in reading and the time spent doing so, with one student plainly saying

good reading is "read all the time," (interview, 6/16/11). This is a key difference not observed with the students in Mrs. N's class.

Another key difference touches on comprehension in reading. Although a few students allude to comprehension in bits and pieces during our interviews, either by using the term or talking about knowing what words mean, Finn, from Mrs. C's class, talks more extensively about the idea. Finn is not a low-level reader overall as his benchmark running record assessment indicates he is meeting grade-level standards, however, he is identified as a bottom-third reader within his class. When talking about a good reader in his class, he compares himself to that child in this way, "I can read *Harry Potter* but I won't understand the words. You have to understand the words," (interview, 6/16/11). In the same manner, Finn describes how he knows another student whom he identifies as a good reader understands what he is reading. Hence, Finn is a student who appears to emphasize comprehension more than the any of the others in the study, regardless of class.

The Role of Social Comparison

The most salient difference between the two classrooms is in the role of social comparison in the reading culture of the classroom. While this notion did not come up in either classroom in relation to good reading, it did appear when discussing good readers and students' perceptions of themselves as readers. Furthermore, the students in Mrs. N's class are more detailed in their responses of this type as they talk about being better/worse than others, apply good/bad labels to readers, and indicate aspects of competition within their approach to reading.

Reading is a social process for all these students. They work together to problem-solve and eagerly discuss what they are reading. The observable nature of this work helps them use the relevant information to make social comparisons, evaluating their abilities against the norms

in the classroom.   In this study, students share their perceptions of themselves as readers. It seems that most students feel they are good readers and base their classifications of themselves on what they notice within the classroom. For example, some students think they are good readers because other students express that idea and ask them for help with reading problems. Other good readers are identified due to observable factors such as the level of the books they are reading, the notion that they do not need help with words, and/or the speed or fluency with which they read aloud. This speaks to the social nature of students' self-perceptions in reading and how students classify themselves as readers based on their abilities or challenges within the classroom (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Hall & Myers, 1998; Jinks & Lorsbach, 2003; Knapp, 2002; Landis, 2003).

This is also congruent with studies that found children frequently identify themselves as readers based on their reading levels (Hall & Myers, 1998; Pierce, 1999). According to the students in this study, children reading higher levels of books are better readers. In addition, almost without fail, the students in both classes talk about themselves in connection to a level of reading, despite both Mrs. N and Mrs. C trying to downplay the importance of reading levels. In fact, Mrs. N explicitly gives students permission to read texts that are not at their level provided they have an interest in the subject and can understand what they are reading. Yet, just as Pierce (1999) found in her action research study, the students still place an increased importance on the level of the books as compared to the teacher.

However, despite these similarities, there is a difference in the emphasis the students put on social comparison and its influence on their perceptions. Students in Mrs. N's class tend to distinguish more concretely in their perceptions of themselves and others as readers. They see readers as better or worse than others and are more apt to label readers as good or bad. For

example, when Abby, a high-level reader within Mrs. N's class, is asked about what kind of

reader she is, she replies, "I think I am an excellent reader. I think I am one of the best ones in

the class, not to brag or anything," indicating a use of social comparison to her peers in order to

evaluate her own abilities (interview, 6/17/11).

Moreover, such comparisons and judgements not only shape how students see

themselves, but they also influence their actions in the classroom. For example, Bradan,

described as a low-level reader within Mrs. N's class, but assessed at a level L, articulates "really

I am not a good reader so I really can't…some books I think are interesting but they are too high

level for me" (interview, 6/15/11). This view shapes his decision to pick another boy named

Kyle from the class to be his reading partner because "we are both not the best readers in the

class and we both help each other out," (interview, 6/15/11). Hence, Bradan uses this social

comparison to help him meet his reading needs; this comparison helps him determine what he is

good at and identify someone with whom he can comfortably work to gain the assistance he feels

he needs. Furthermore, this connects to self-concept research. As Bong and Clark (1999)

explain, self-concept tends to be descriptive and evaluative in nature while also including

feelings of self-worth. They describe self-concept as incorporating an approval or disapproval of

self after comparing one's ability to a standard or norm. Based on district benchmarks, Bradan is

really performing in the average range as a reader, although he seems to think more negatively of

his abilities in relation to the "standards or norms" within the classroom.

However, another element that comes from this social comparison in Mrs. N's class is

that of competition. During a reading mini-lesson, Matteo is observed reading intently while

other students appear to be focusing on listening to the teacher and/or haphazardly flipping

through their books on the carpet. When asked about it later, he shares that he was "so ahead of

Luke, he was on 29 and I was on 65 and so Luke was like flipping through his book to try to catch up to me," and eventually acknowledges wanting to stay ahead of Luke (observation and interview, 6/15/11). Additionally, when asked about her goals for herself as a reader, Abby indicates that she wants to be a better reader than her brother in third grade and references the book levels and her desire to "really want to catch up to him on reading," (interview, 6/17/11).

This sense of competition is in contrast to the role of social comparison in Mrs. C's classroom. In Mrs. C's class, reading appears to be more collaborative and is a means of socialization. Other than directing students to read in partnerships, I did not discuss or witness any explicit teaching or discussion about reading being a way to socialize and interact with peers, yet it clearly is in this class. For example, students seem to enjoy reading together, discussing various series and chapter books, exhibit an interest in finding out from other students "what books they like too," and comparing their ideas (interview, 6/16/11). Hence, the comparison in this class seems more collaborative and appears to be more for the purpose of finding commonalities; students appear to be looking to find others with similar interests and reading levels for the purpose of collaboratively reading and discussing books. Generally, reading does not seem to be an isolated practice between reader and text; rather its' purpose is bigger than that as students share out and discuss their thinking about reading with a larger audience.

As a result, there is still an element of social comparison as an evaluative component of reading that emerges from the data in Mrs. C's class, however, there is little to no indication of a competitive nature to it. When asked whom he would choose as a reading partner, Nick names another boy from the class because he considers the other boy a good reader "and so am I," (interview, 6/16/11). In addition, when Lauren was asked what kind of reader she considers herself, she replies, "a really good one" because "my friends always say it because when they are

stuck on words they ask me to help them," (interview, 6/17/11). In this study, the students in

Mrs. C's class did not indicate wanting to be "better" than other students in the same sense that

students in Mrs. N's class did. Generally, these students appear to want to increase levels to

improve their own reading, be able to read higher level books that interest them, and be on

similar levels as friends in order to collaboratively read and discuss books.

Summary of Key Differences

Thus, although the students' perceptions in both classes are quite similar and supported

by relevant literature in the areas of accuracy, fluency, and difficulty, there are also some key

differences in what students emphasize. In both interviews and observations, Mrs. N's students

emphasize these components of reading more heavily than their peers in Mrs. C's class. While

students in both classes articulate that accuracy is an important element to reading, students in

Mrs. N's class appear to take this notion more seriously as they are quick to correct both

themselves and others when necessary. To decode, students in both classes refer to phonics

"sounding out" strategies first and foremost. Yet, the students in Mrs. N's class are more apt to

get stuck or turn to others for assistance if their initial phonics-based decoding strategy is

unsuccessful. On the other hand, the students in Mrs. C's class demonstrate more of a complete

"toolbox" of strategies that they can use interchangeably to problem-solve and decode words.

Even if they cannot figure out the unknown word correctly, they are able to gain some level of

meaning from the text and move on independently.

With respect to difficulty, it seems that the students in Mrs. N's class want to move up in

reading levels as an indication of progress, and sometimes, competition. However, when

students in Mrs. C's class talk about moving up levels, it appears to connect more with an

interest in reading certain books. Finally, students in Mrs. C's class share ideas about the interest

and time spent reading by good readers and one student is able to articulate his thoughts about

the role of comprehension in good reading; similar ideas are not discussed by the students in

Mrs. N's class.

However, the most salient difference between the students in the two classes is the role of

social comparison. In Mrs. N's class, social comparison appears to serve primarily as a means of

evaluating oneself in relation to one's peers and seems very black or white in nature. Students

are either good or bad readers, better or worse than their peers. On the other hand, in Mrs. C's

class, social comparison seems to have a more collaborative purpose as students seek to gain

information about themselves and others as readers to further their reading lifestyle of sharing

and discussing books. Possible reasons for these differences are explored in the next section.

Conclusions

At first glance, these two second-grade classrooms appear very similar on the surface.

However, upon closer inspection, one can see differences in how students speak about reading

and what they choose to emphasize. This raises the question as to why these differences exist.

What does this say about the teachers, the classroom environment, and the reading instruction

taking place? As the classroom leaders, teachers create the classroom environment, both

explicitly and implicitly. While their explicit messages about reading may be clear, students are

still gaining information from the more subtle implicit messages they are receiving. Moreover,

the reading criteria teachers choose to emphasize in their classrooms, and how they do so, may

influence students' perceptions as well.

Teacher Beliefs

First, when examining the influence of instruction on students' perceptions, the findings

of this study indicate that the students' beliefs about reading are largely reflective of their

teachers' beliefs and practices. This is supported by other research that found students'

perceptions often mirror the beliefs of their teachers (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Thomas &

Barksdale-Ladd, 1997). In Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd's (1997) case study of two kindergarten

teachers' approaches to reading instruction, one teacher utilized more of a whole language

approach while the other favored a skills-based approach. In general, the students from each

class mirrored their teachers' beliefs as the skills-based students tended to see reading and

writing as a sequence of skills to be mastered, while the whole language classroom students

participated in the process of reading and writing using whatever knowledge they had.

Similar results can be seen in this study. As an example, the students in Mrs. N's class

reflect her emphasis on the role of phonics to accurately decode words, and the students in Mrs.

C's class are able to use a variety of skills interchangeably to decode unknown words and

problem-solve as they talk about their reading. In general, each of these overall student

perceptions are reflective of the beliefs the teachers shared and discussed during their interviews.

Social Comparison and the Classroom Culture

Next, it is natural for students to use social comparison to evaluate themselves. Dweck

(2002) describes how children, around their kindergarten years, use social comparison to

evaluate their own abilities and often distinguish them as good or bad.   This is supported by the

view of Bong & Clark (1999) that when a person lacks experience with a task, their beliefs tend

to include more social comparison. Hence, when children are just learning to read in these early

years, it would make sense that they would use these outside means of observing their peers as a

source of information to evaluate their own performance.

Therefore, the classroom environment is a natural setting for such comparisons to take

place. As Gee's (1990) theory of social discourse describes, all forms of discourse or

communication (e.g. words, actions, verbal, nonverbal, etc.) can influence one's social status or identity within a setting. While students' understanding of reading tends to be reflective of their teachers' beliefs and instructional practices (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997), students still seem to refer to the observable and social norms around them to make meaning of the classroom discourse. Moreover, students can have different life experiences and perceptions, even of the same events within a classroom, which can shape their views (Ames, 1992).

In addition, as Bong and Clark (1999) describe, self-concept may be connected to social comparison as it incorporates an approval or disapproval of self after comparing one's ability to a standard or norm. This can lead to a "privileged social status" that some students may benefit from based on the social interactions within the classroom (Christian & Bloome, 2004, p. 367). Therefore, it is important to understand that reading instruction does not stand alone as a teacher-student-text relationship; rather, there are a number of variables that may not appear at first glance to link directly to reading instruction, but can still influence a student's reading self-concept.

The classroom culture that Mrs. N helps to create may inadvertently emphasize social comparison more than the environment in Mrs. C's room. For instance, although students already overemphasize public aspects of reading such as those that relate to difficulty, accuracy, and fluency (Henk & Melnick, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Tancock, 1997), Mrs. N may add information to this public realm through the types of tasks she assigns and how they are carried out in the classroom (Ames, 1992). Brophy (1983) describes how children can shift the emphasis of product-oriented classroom activities that are based on mastery of specific skills to a more performance-based task as they focus on observable factors (as in Ames, 1992, p. 264). As

an example, Mrs. N's use of flash cards and round-robin reading, although intended as

opportunity to practice and master reading skills, can lead to observable performances during

which students can compare their skills and abilities with others. Thus, these types of

experiences may be implicitly serving to reinforce the importance of observable factors such as

reading level, decoding skills, and accuracy rates as students naturally seek to gain information

from the world around them.

On the other hand, although Mrs. C also teaches the importance of decoding and

accuracy, the social environment in her class may be considered more participatory in nature and

may not present the same opportunities for students to observe each other perform. As Finn in

Mrs. C's class explains, he knows two boys in his class are good readers because he can hear it

in their fluency when they read aloud (interview, 6/16/11). On the other hand, he also points out

that he does not really know how he would tell if someone in his class is a good reader because,

"we don't really read in our classroom to people, like, not a lot." Hence, in this instance, it is

clear that the observable (or unobservable) performance nature of classroom tasks can influence

students' perceptions. This could explain the additional detail and emphasis on social

comparison in the interviews with students from Mrs. N's class.

Criteria Emphasized in Reading Instruction

Moreover, Mrs. C seems to emphasize other components that may add to the information

her students are receiving about reading. Although a skill-based classroom theoretically, Mrs. C

has more of a whole-language inclination as evidenced by her TORP score. As such, she focuses

instruction on going from whole to part in that the students would use and understand the

purpose of language, participate in it as capable, and learn skills in context (Turner, 1995, p.

413). Perhaps, in this manner, students tend not to overemphasize a limited number of factors as

they begin to develop an understanding of the complexity of reading. For example, while Mrs. C

does mention a big focus on decoding and comprehension, she references always starting with

what makes sense first. In addition, Mrs. C shares that she believes children need to be given

plenty of time to read independently and in small groups, with the more modeling the better.

Although her students could not define and articulate the concept of fluency with the same

specification as the students in Mrs. N's class, they clearly have an understanding of what fluent

reading is, and what it is not, based on the examples they share and discuss in their interviews.

Hence, teachers may be helping to create the amount and quality of the criteria students

have accessible to use in their social comparisons about reading. From the literature, we know

that good reading instruction incorporates skills related to effective decoding and accuracy,

fluency, and meaningful comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Not surprisingly then, these are some

of the high quality criteria teachers tend to focus on in planning and delivering their reading

instruction to early readers. Yet, as reading instructors, we understand the complexity of reading

and realize the importance of other factors. For instance, we are also aware of the significance of

the time spent practicing reading and the value of an interest in, and love for, reading. And,

while we may not appreciate the frequency or methods of standardized assessments, we can

understand the notion of matching students to appropriately-leveled texts and the idea of being

able to use levels to help show progress and growth. Therefore, it may be an important part of

our duty in teaching reading to expose student to all of these factors and help them understand

some of this complexity, rather than oversimplifying it.

If teachers choose to emphasize some components over others, either explicitly or

implicitly, this can be problematic for students as it may limit the criteria students "see" around

them and use for social comparison. For example, a teacher that stresses accuracy in decoding

may be limiting the scope of what students perceive in the social environment around them. If

students perceive that the teacher is judging or evaluating reading skills based on this criteria

alone, this can influence how they see themselves and others as readers. This oversimplification

can lead to a more black/white view of reading in which students perceive things as right/wrong

or good/bad.

In fact, this may be dangerous in the sense that it could lead to a more competitive

classroom culture rather than a collaborative one. By limiting the scope of what students see as

good reading, it could make reading appear more linear in nature with a perceived end goal. For

example, in Mrs. N's class, it could be said that her focus on accuracy in decoding and fluency

steers students to an oversimplification of the nature of reading, thereby limiting their

perceptions about good reading and themselves as readers. This could add to their desire to

progress through and increase levels in a race to get a falsely perceived finish line of sorts. On

the other hand, although Mrs. C also teaches her students about accuracy in decoding and

fluency, she demonstrates and adds to the "definition of reading" in her classroom. Perhaps Mrs.

C adds complexity and depth to the process by exposing students to other high quality criteria

that include interest, time, practice, expression, and meaning. There is no end or finish line. She

shares the message that reading is a continual process that everyone can and should participate in

at their own level. Hence, this could explain why her students may be more apt to be interested

in other students' reading levels, not to be better than them, but to be able to collaborate as

readers to share and discuss books.

Summary

The two teachers in this study follow the same district mandates and, though their

classrooms may appear very similar, there are differences in how students view and speak about

reading. This raises additional questions as to the reason these differences exist. It could be that

the teachers are creating different classroom environments through the aspects of reading they

choose to emphasize, the tasks and approaches they choose, and the explicit and implicit

messages that students are receiving as a result. As students make social comparisons in order to

make sense of the world around them, the classroom environment may be influencing students'

perceptions about reading more than teachers realize.

Implications for Policy and Practice

As previously indicated, my purpose of this study is to contribute to the current literature

on early reading instruction by providing students with an opportunity to share their perceptions

of what reading is and how they view themselves as readers. This study is significant as it adds

depth and description to teachers' and students' beliefs about reading, while filling in some gaps

in understanding the relationship between these two perspectives.

First, there is a connection between teachers' beliefs and practices and students'

understanding of reading. Despite professional development, personal history experiences

influence teachers' beliefs about reading instruction (Deal and White, 2006; Thomas &

Barksdale-Ladd, 1997). This is important for educators to be aware of, and use to their

advantage, as they implement mandated reading instruction programs. Similarly, building and

curricular administrators need to realize the strength of these influences as well, and understand

that mandated policies or programs often are interpreted differently by teachers and may actually

have little impact on actual classroom instruction (Allington, 2002; Coburn, 2001).

Teachers should take time to be reflective about their personal beliefs toward reading

instruction and how their theoretical orientations may be influencing their instruction. As the

findings of this and other studies indicate, students' beliefs about reading are largely reflective of

their teachers' beliefs and practices (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997).

Educators should consider the reasons behind their professional decision-making. Are their

instructional decisions based on theory or research, classroom observations, district policy, or

simply habit? Important to note is the work of Valencia et al. (2006) which demonstrates that

while curricular changes may not independently shape teacher instruction as much as hoped or

anticipated, this may not be negative as such changes influence teachers' thoughtfulness and

responsiveness to students' needs. As professionals, thinking about one's instructional choices

can help make them more purposeful and, this step alone, could make teachers more responsive

to students' needs.

Furthermore, this study highlights the influence of social comparison on student

perceptions and suggests how it may affect students' understanding of good reading and of

themselves as readers. The role of social comparison in relation to children's developing self-

concept is crucial to keep in mind, particularly in connection with student engagement and

motivation. Moreover, the idea that social comparison can lead to a level of competition is an

element with which educators need to grapple. Although the competition factor may be a

concern that some may want to deemphasize, others may consider the students who respond to

competition and use it as a motivator and a means of measurable progress. Clearly, the social

component of students' perceptions of themselves, specifically in reading, and how students

classify themselves as readers based on their abilities or challenges within the classroom, is

important for educators to be aware of and consider in their daily decision-making (Christian &

Bloome, 2004; Hall & Myers, 1998; Jinks & Lorsbach, 2003; Knapp, 2002; Landis, 2003).

In creating policy, professionals need to be aware of the role of social comparison and

that it may influence students as much as the explicit curricular programs they mandate. The

notion that students focus on the observable aspects of reading (Henk & Melnick, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Tancock, 1997) is useful to the educators who design curricular programs to help teach early readers, as well as the teachers who work with those students. Overall, the students in this study failed to see the value of comprehension and extrapolating meaning from the text. Perhaps teachers need to utilize more explicit instruction that focuses on the meaning of text, in addition to decoding strategies and fluency practice. Additionally, by understanding how students are influenced by the social context of the classroom and observing others, educators can seek to create opportunities for comprehension skills and practice to gain recognition and value within that environment. This could be an area of professional development that would make a valuable addition to teachers' skill sets.

I would further suggest that professionals reconsider expanding the criteria considered in good reading instruction. For example, rather than overemphasizing a narrow focus on decoding strategies for accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, allow teachers the room to more adequately open up the reading process to students. This would require both time and a level of freedom in planning lessons that still include an emphasis on core components such as accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, but also enable teachers to slow down and provide students opportunities to engage with reading and readers. Give both teachers and students additional opportunities to foster and grow an interest in, and enjoyment of, reading for the sake of reading and learning to appreciate literature. It should not always be a means to an end and exist solely as a skill to be mastered. Furthermore, both policy-makers and administrators should realize that a classroom environment that helps foster successful readers may not necessarily always follow specific lesson plan formats with observable goals and objectives that can be formally assessed. Rather, teachers should be able to expand the definition by sharing with their students multiple high-

quality criteria for good reading, including the notion that it is a social process. Reading can serve as a valuable means of sharing information and exchanging ideas, but this involves broadening its scope, rather than narrowing it.

Ultimately, educators need to be aware of the "hidden" instruction that may be taking place within the social context of classrooms. Although teachers may be directly and explicitly instructing students related to reading or any particular curricular content, they are also contributing to the more subtle implicit information that students perceive from the social interactions and norms in the classroom. Students give their own meaning to classroom experiences (Ames, 1992). Typical classroom activities can serve as instructional tools, but also can help build or change social identities on a larger level (Christian & Bloome, 2004). While this aspect may not be able to be eliminated, increasing educators' awareness of it, and its influence, can help teachers create a more relevant social context for learning. This information could be used to help teachers assign tasks and assignments, increase students' motivation and engagement, and present opportunities for students' social observations in the classroom to lead to more successful experiences. The explicit instruction contained in various mandated programs is not the only information the students are receiving. Going forward, educators need to be wary of these factors and, perhaps, shift the focus of their academic classroom tasks.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Undoubtedly, this study is limited due its case study design. As such, it is bound by its setting and small sample size, thereby providing limited data with decreased generalization abilities. While I attempted to achieve maximum variation within these confines, it is true that the sample is very homogenous in nature. Both teachers are identified as having a skills orientation to reading, and the student participants all have similar socio-economic and cultural

backgrounds. Further research should explore these concepts in other settings with different populations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions and see if these findings still hold true.

Next, a great deal of information was gained through both the student and teacher interviews. However, a more seasoned interviewer may have had more natural, effective follow-up questions to gain additional material about these important perspectives. Also, while this case study provides interesting qualitative information, perhaps a future study could incorporate more in-depth interviews about teachers' beliefs and practices. Conceivably, a series of interviews could be used, or a focus group and subsequent follow-up interviews, to yield further insight into the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and their students' perceptions.

Additionally, the research time-frame limits the scope of this study. As this researcher had to fulfill the necessary requirements of my own teaching position while conducting this study, data-collecting opportunities were limited by mutual scheduling conflicts between myself and the classes with which I was working. Moreover, data collection took place approximately four weeks toward the end of the school year. While too early in the school year may not have afforded similar results with respect to the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions about reading, a longer research time-frame could have provided additional material to further describe the phenomenon. It would be interesting if future research could follow a group of Pre-K to Grade 3 students in a longitudinal study to document the development of reading self-concept and the changes students experience in their perceptions about reading and themselves as readers.

This study adds to the limited research discussing the influence of social comparison on student perceptions with respect to reading. Undoubtedly, however, the relationship between the

social environment of a classroom and its influence on student perceptions warrants additional

investigation as it may influence the motivation, engagement, and learning of early readers.

Hence, this study has only begun to tap the surface of this issue and researchers need to

further explore the impact of self-efficacy on student engagement and learning, particularly with

younger learners. These students have a long academic career ahead of them and professionals

need to do all they can to keep them engaged as active participants in their own learning.

Furthermore, educators need additional practical information that can help them confidently

make decisions that have a positive impact on the young learners in their care.

Table 10

Student Responses According to Theme

Theme	Mrs. N's class	Both classes	Mrs. C's class
1. Accuracy		Critical component of good reading; phonics is preferred decoding strategy	While phonics is a preferred strategy, interchangeable use of strategies evident
2. Fluency	More emphasis and articulation	Referenced in both classes	Demonstrated understanding but difficulty in defining or talking about it
3. Comprehension	One student mentioned, "I understand books."		One student went into detail about the importance of understanding words and books
4. Difficulty	Wanted to increase levels seemingly to show progress and advance	Students referenced similarly in frequency, although both teachers downplayed importance	Wanted to increase levels due to interest in higher-level books

5. Interest and Time		All students talked about being interested in books/series, love to read	Evidence of an association with good reading and good readers
6. Reading as a Socially-Constructed Process	More detailed responses and emphasis on social comparison, some competition	Referenced by students in both classes, evidence of cooperation in reading, active engagement in their reading	Represents a means of socialization as students discuss reading and books

References

Allington, R. L. (2000). Effects of reading policy on classroom instruction and student achievement. In *Curriculum Wars: Alternative Approaches to Reading and Mathematics.* New York: National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement.

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures, and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*(3), 261-271.

Bergeron, B., & Bradbury-Wolff, M. (2010). "If it's not fixed, the staples are out!" Documenting young children's perceptions of strategic reading processes. *Reading Horizons, 50*(1), 1-22.

Bloome, D., & Katz, L. (1997). Literacy as social practice and classroom chronotopes. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 13,* 205-225.

Bong, M. & Clark, R.E. (1999). Comparison between self-concept and self-efficacy in academic motivation research. *Educational Psychologist, 34,* 139-153.

Buckendahl, C. W., Huynh, H., Siskind, T., & Saunders, J. (2005). A case study of vertically moderated standard setting for a state science assessment program. *Applied Measurement in Education, 18*(1), 83-98.

Calkins, L. & Martinelli, M. (2006). *Launching the writing workshop.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Chapman, L., Greenfield, R., & Rinaldi, C. (2010). "Drawing is a frame of mind": An evaluation of students' perceptions about reading instruction within a response to intervention model. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 49,* 113-128.

Chapman, J. W., & Tunmer, W. E. (2003). Reading difficulties, reading-related self-

perceptions, and strategies for overcoming negative self-beliefs. *Reading &*

Writing Quarterly, 19, 5-24.

Christian, B., & Bloome, D. (2004). Learning to read is who you are. *Reading & Writing*

Quarterly, 20, 365-384.

Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading

policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,*

23(2), 145-170.

Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research*

strategies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five*

Traditions. CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W., & Miller, D.L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into*

practice. 39(3), 124-130.

Dahl, K. L. (1995). Challenges in understanding the learner's perspective. *Theory into Practice,*

34(2), 124-130.

Deal, D., & White, C. S. (2006). Voices from the classroom: Literacy beliefs and practices of

two novice elementary teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 20*(4),

313-329.

De Ford, D. (1985). Validating the construct of theoretical orientation in reading. *Reading*

Research Quarterly, 20, 351-367.

Dweck, C. (2002). The development of ability conceptions. In J. Eccles & A. Wigfield (Eds.),

Development of achievement motivation (pp. 57-88). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Fullan, M. (2002). Leadership and sustainability. *Principal Leadership (High School Ed.)*. *3*, 14-

    17.

Fullan, M., & Stiegelbauer, S. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York:

    Teachers College Press.

Gandal, M., & McGiffert, L. (2003). The power of testing. *Educational Leadership, 60*(5), 39-

    42.

Gates, A. I. (2002). What should we teach in reading? *Reading Psychology, 23*, 341-344.

Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses.* London: The

    Falmer Press.

Hall, K., & Myers, J. (1998). "That's just the way I am": Metacognition, personal intelligence

    and reading. *Reading, 32(2),* 8-13.

Hampton, E. M., & Cashman, T. G. (2004). The highly questionable "highly qualified" label.

    Action in Teacher Education, 26(2), 15-23.

Hanke, V. (2014). Guided reading: Young pupils' perspectives on classroom practice. *Literacy,*

    48(3), 136-143.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings.* Albany, NY: State

    University of New York Press.

Henk, W. A., & Melnick, S. A. (1998). Upper elementary-aged children's reported perceptions

    about good readers: A self-efficacy influenced update in transitional literacy contexts.

    Reading Research and Instruction, 38(1), 57-80.

Jinks, J.L., & Lorsbach, A.W. (2003). Motivation and self-efficacy belief. *Reading and Writing*

    Quarterly 19, 113-118.

Johnson, J. C. (2005). What makes a good reader? Asking students to define good readers.

    Reading Teacher, 58(8), 766-770.

Kim, B. (2001). Social constructivism. In M. Orey (Ed.), Emerging perspectives on learning,

    teaching, and technology. Retrieved November 26, 2005, from:

    http://www.coe.uga/edu/epltt/SocialConstructivism.htm

Knapp, N. F. (2002). Tom and Joshua: Perceptions, conceptions and progress in meaning-based

    reading instruction. *Journal of Literacy Research, 34*(1), 59-98.

Landis, D. (1999). Students' stories about reading education. *Language Arts, 76*(3), 210-216.

Landis, D. (2003). Reading and writing as social, cultural practices: Implications for literacy

    education. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 19*, 281-307.

Levy, R. (2009). Children's perceptions of reading and the use of reading scheme texts.

    Cambridge Journal of Education, 39(3), 361-377.

Linnenbrink, E.A. & Pintrich, P.R. (2003). The role of self-efficacy beliefs in student

    engagement and learning in the classroom. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 19,* 119-137.

Lynch, J. (2002). Parents' self-efficacy beliefs, parents' gender, children's reader self-perceptions,

    reading achievement and gender. *Journal of Research in Reading, 25*(1), 54-67.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research, 3rd Edition.* CA: Sage

    Publications.

Mason, L., Meadan, H., Hedin, L., & Cramer, A. (2012). Avoiding the struggle: Instruction that

    supports students' motivation in reading and writing about content material. *Reading &*

    Writing Quarterly, 28(1), 70-96.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

    Publications.

Morrison, T. G., Wilcox, B., Madrigal, J. L., Roberts, S., & Hintze, E. (1999). Teachers'

theoretical orientations toward reading and pupil control ideology: A national survey.

Reading Research and Instruction, 38(4), 333-350.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National*

Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the

scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction (NIH

Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Neill, M. (2003). The dangers of testing. *Educational Leadership, 60*(5), 43-46.

Nolen, S.B. (2007). Young children's motivation to read and write: Development in social

contexts. *Cognition and Instruction, 25*(2), 219-270.

Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research,*

66(4), 543-578.

Patterson, J. (2014). The lifesaving power of reading. In L. Bridges (Ed.), *Open a world of*

possible: Real stories about the joy and power of reading (pp. 216-217). New York:

Scholastic.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* Newbury Park: Sage

Publications.

Perry, N. E., VandeKamp, K. O., Mercer, L. K., & Nordby, C. J. (2002). Investigating teacher-

student interactions that foster self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology. 37*(1),

5-15.

Pierce, K. M. (1999). "I am a level 3 reader": Children's perceptions of themselves as readers.

The New Advocate, 12(4), 358-375.

Porter, A. C., Linn, R. L., & Trimble, C. S. (2005). The effects of state decisions about NCLB

adequate yearly progress targets. *Educational Measurement: Issues & Practice, 24*(4),

32-39.

Quick, B. N. (1998). Beginning reading and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): Past,

present, and future. *Peabody Journal of Education, 73*(3-4), 253-272.

Reutzel, D. R., & Sabey, B. (1996). Teacher beliefs and children's concepts about reading: Are

they related? *Reading Research and Instruction, 35*(4), 323-342.

Richards, J. C. (2001). What do teachers and their students think and know about reading? An

exploratory study, *European Conference on Reading*. Dublin, Ireland.

Richards, L. (2005). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Publications.

Scharer, P. L., Pinnell, G. S., Lyons, C., & Fountas, I. (2005). Becoming an engaged reader.

Educational Leadership, 63(2), 24-29.

Schmoker, M. (2003). First things first: Demystifying data analysis. *Educational Leadership, 60*

(5), 22-24.

Slavin, R. E. (2003). A reader's guide to scientifically based research. *Educational Leadership,*

60 (5), 12-16.

Smith, T. M., Desimone, L. M., & Ueno, K. (2005). "Highly qualified" to do what? The

relationship between NCLB teacher quality mandates and the use of reform-oriented

instruction in middle school mathematics. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis,*

27(1), 75-109.

Smith, J.K., & Smith, L.G. (1994). *Education today: The foundations of a profession*. New

York: St. Martin's Press.

Stahl, S.A. (1997) Instructional models in reading: An introduction. In S.A. Stahl & D. Hayes

    (Eds.), *Instructional models in reading* (pp. 1-29). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum

    Associates.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Strickland, D. S., Galda, L., & Cullinan, B. E. (2004). *Language Arts: Learning and Teaching*:

    Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Tancock, S. M. (1997). Catie: A case study of one first grader's reading status. *Reading*

    Research and Instruction, 36, 89-110.

Thomas, K. F., & Barksdale-Ladd, M. A. (1997). Plant a radish, get a radish: Case study of

    kindergarten teachers' differing literacy belief systems. *Reading Research and*

    Instruction, 37, 39-60.

Tracey, D. H., & Morrow, L. M. (2006). *Lenses on reading: An introduction to theories and*

    models. New York: The Guilford Press.

Turner, J.C. (1995). The influence of classroom contexts on young children's motivation for

    literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*(3), 410-441.

Valencia, S. W., Place, N. A., Martin, S. D., & Grossman, P. L. (2006). Curriculum materials for

    elementary reading: Shackles and scaffolds for four beginning teachers. *The Elementary*

    School Journal, 107(1), 93-120.

Wiersma, W. & Jurs, S.G. (2005). *Research methods in education: An introduction.*

    Boston: Pearson Education.

Wixson, K. K., & Yochum, N. (2004). Research on literacy policy and professional

    development: National, state, district, and teacher contexts. *The Elementary*

    School Journal, 105(2), 219-242.

Wolcott, H. F. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research, 2nd edition.* California: Sage

    Publications.

Zimmerman, B.J. (2000). Self-efficacy: An essential motive to learn. *Educational Psychology,*

    25, 82-91.

Appendix A

TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Renee R. Osterbye, who is a student in the Learning and Teaching Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine what second-graders perceive as "good" reading and their thoughts about themselves as readers.

Approximately 2 teachers will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately 30-90 minutes.

Participation in this study will involve the following: a written survey, an individual interview, a series of three classroom observations, and a follow-up interview.

This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes your beliefs about reading, your interview responses, a class list of students with reading levels, and classroom observation notes. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. Any codes that link your identity with your response will be held solely by the researcher.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may be learning about second grade students' perspectives about reading which may help teachers make informed, meaningful instructional decisions to more effectively meet the needs of all students. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at:
Renee R. Osterbye
Conover Road Elementary School
80 Conover Road
Colts Neck, NJ 07722
Tel: 732-946-0055 ext. 7521
Email: tsc227@msn.com

Or you can contact my advisor, Dr. Nora Hyland, at:
Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University
10 Seminary Place
Room 212
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Tel: 732-932-7496 ext. 8138
Email: nora.hyland@gse.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____   Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____   Date _____

AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Students' and Teachers' Perspectives on Reading: A Case Study conducted by Renee R. Osterbye. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape (sound) as part of that research study.   You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the researcher.

The recording(s) will include your responses during our interview discussions.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to your identity and will be retained for a period of three years upon completion of this study.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____   Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____   Date _____

Appendix B

DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP)

Name:

Directions: Read the following statements and circle one of the responses that will indicate the relationship of the statement to your feelings about reading and reading instruction. (SA = Strongly Agree, SD = Strongly Disagree).

		SA	**2**	**3**	**4**	**SD**
1.	A child needs to be able to verbalize the rules of phonics in order to assure proficiency in processing new words.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	An increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Dividing words into syllables according to rules is a helpful instructional practice for reading new words.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Fluency and expression are necessary components of reading that indicate good comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Materials for early reading should be written in natural language without concern for short, simple words and sentences.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	When children do not know a word, they should be instructed to sound out the parts.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	It is a good practice to allow children to edit what is written into their own dialect when learning to read.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The use of a glossary or dictionary is necessary when determining the meaning and pronunciation of new words.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Reversals (e.g., saying "was" for "saw") are significant problems in the teaching of reading.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	It is a good practice to correct a child as soon as an oral reading mistake is made.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	It is important for a word to be repeated a number of times after it has been introduced to ensure that it will become a part of sight vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Paying close attention to puncutation marks is necessary to understand story content.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	It is a sign of an ineffective reader when words and phrases are repeated.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Being able to label words according to grammatical function (e.g., nouns, etc.) is useful in proficient reading.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	When coming to a word that is unknown, the reader should be encouraged to guess the meaning and go on.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Young readers need to be introduced to the root form of words (e.g., run, long,) before they are asked to read inflected forms.	1	2	3	4	5

		SA	**2**	**3**	**4**	**SD**
17.	It is not necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet in order to learn to read.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Flash-card drills with sight words are unnecessary forms of practice in reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Ability to use accent patterns in myltisyllabic words (pho' to graph, pho to' gra phy, and pho to gra' phic) should be developed as part of reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Controlling text through consistent spelling patterns (e.g., The fat cat ran back. The fat cat sat on a hat.) is a means by which children can best learn to read.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Formal instruction in reading is necessary to ensure the adequate development of all the skills used in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Phonic analysis is the most important form of analysis used when meeting new words.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Children's initial encounters with print should focus on meaning, not upon exact graphic representation.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Word shapes (word configuration) should be taught in reading to aid in word recognition.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	It is important to teach skills in relation to other skills.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	If a child says "house" for the written word "home," the response should be left uncorrected.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	It is not necessary to introduce new words before they appear in the reading text.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Some problems in reading words are caused by readers dropping the inflectional endings from words (e.g., jump*s*, jump*ed*.)	1	2	3	4	5

By number, indicate any items on the TORP that you found especially difficult to answer.

Appendix C

PARENT/STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Your child is invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Renee R. Osterbye, who is a student in the Learning and Teaching Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine what second-graders perceive as "good" reading and their thoughts about themselves as readers.

Approximately 12 second-grade students will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately 10-20 minutes.

Participation in this study will involve the following: an individual interview and a series of three classroom observations.

This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about your child and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your child's identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about your child includes his/her ideas about reading, thoughts about himself/herself as a reader, and classroom observation notes. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. Any codes that link your child's identity with his/her response will be held solely by the researcher.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child's participation in this study.

Your child has been told that the benefit of taking part in this study may be helping teachers learn about second grade students' ideas about reading. However, your child may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to allow your child to participate, and you may withdraw your consent at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you or your child.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at:
Renee R. Osterbye
Conover Road Elementary School
80 Conover Road
Colts Neck, NJ 07722
Tel: 732-946-0055 ext. 7521
Email: tsc227@msn.com

or you can contact my advisor, Dr. Nora Hyland, at:
Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University
10 Seminary Place
Room 212
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Tel: 732-932-7496 ext. 8138
Email: nora.hyland@gse.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study:

Child's Name (Print) _____

Parent/Guardian's Name (Print) _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to allow your child to participate in a research study entitled: Students' and Teachers' Perspectives on Reading: A Case Study conducted by Renee R. Osterbye. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape (sound) as part of that research study.   You do not have to agree to allow your child to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the researcher.

The recording(s) will include your child's responses during our interview discussions.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to your child's identity and will be retained for a period of three years upon completion of this study.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record your child as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Child's Name (Print) _____

Parent/Guardian's Name (Print) _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

ASSENT FOR CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Things to Remember:
- **You are being asked to be in a research study or project. Studies or projects are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.**

- **This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.**

- **You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.**

- **It is okay to say "No" if you don't want to be in the study. If you say "Yes" you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.**

- **If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent or a guardian) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study/project.**

1. Mrs. Osterbye, from the Elementary School and from Rutgers University, is inviting you to take part in a research study or project.

*2. Y*ou are being asked to take part in a research study/project because I am trying to learn more about teaching. My project is about 2nd graders and reading. For part of my project, I want to ask kids like you what they think about reading.

3. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you questions about what you think about reading because often no one asks kids. There are no right or wrong answers, I'd just like to know more about your ideas about reading and talk about them with you.

4. Nothing bad will happen if you agree to be in the study.

5. Nothing really good will happen to you if you agree to be in the study. You will be helping me understand what second-graders think about reading, which can help teachers teach kids reading.

6. Please talk this over with your parent(s)/guardian before you decide whether or not to participate. I will also ask your parent(s)/guardian to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parent(s)/guardian say "yes", you can still say "NO" and decide not to do this study/project.

7. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset with you if you don't want to participate. You can even change your mind later and want to stop at any point.

8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can get in touch with me, Mrs. Osterbye, 732-946-0055 (x7521), tsc227@msn.com, or ask me next time.

You may also ask questions or talk about any worries to the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate). Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University either by phone: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104 or by email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu.

9. By participating in this study/these procedures, you agree to be a participant in this study (project). You and your parent(s)/guardian will be given a copy of this form.

Appendix D

Sample Observation Codes

Theoretical Orientation	Examples of Corresponding Observations
1. Phonics (P)	- Verbalization of phonics rules - Division of words into syllables according to rules - Sounding out unknown words according to parts - Teacher correcting student immediately after oral reading mistake - Paying close attention to punctuation marks to understand story content - Controlling text through consistent spelling patterns (e.g., short a focus – The fat cat ran back. The fat cat sat on a hat.)
2. Skills (S)	- Fluency and expression are emphasized to indicate good comprehension - Use of glossary/dictionary to determine meaning and pronunciation of new words - Repeating a new word a number of times after it has been introduced to ensure it becomes part of sight vocabulary - Labeling words according to grammatical function (e.g., nouns, pronouns, etc.) - Focusing on root words (e.g., run, long) before reading inflected forms of words (e.g., running, longest) - Emphasizing/using accent patterns in multisyllabic words - Teaching/practicing word shapes (word configuration) to aid in word recognition - Skills are taught in relation, or connected to, other skills - Pointing out when readers drop inflectional endings from words (e.g., jump*s*, jump*ed*)
3. Whole Language (WL)	- Reading materials are written natural language without concern for short, simple words and sentences - When coming to an unknown word, the reader is encouraged to guess the meaning and go on. - Flash-cards/sight words are NOT used. - Reading is focused on meaning, not exact decoding (e.g., if a child says "house" for the written word "home," the response is left uncorrected) - New vocabulary is NOT introduced before they appear in written text. - Students make decisions about their reading material

Appendix E

Teacher Interview Protocol

Sample Teacher Interview Questions

- What do you think good reading instruction is? What does it include/not include?

- What kind of teacher do you consider yourself? Do you believe you associate with a

  particular theory or philosophy? Why/why not? Who/what has influenced your beliefs

  about reading?

- What do you feel the role of phonics should be in reading instruction? Follow up about

  phonics instruction in classroom practice.

- What about skills? What skills do you think are necessary to teach for second-graders to

  become good readers? Follow up about skill practice within classroom instruction.

- When you hear the term "whole language" associated with reading, what comes to mind?

  Follow up based on response.

- Follow up and ask questions based on TORP responses, particularly if participant

  indicated strong agreement or disagreement with a statement.

- Tell me about how you plan your lessons. How much common planning time do you

  have? How do you use it?

- What were your two or three most important goals for reading this year?

- How did you know if students were making progress toward those goals?

- How are your beliefs about reading instruction matched with what/how you actually

  teach in the classroom? Why do you think that is?

- In general, what are your thoughts about the district's current approach to reading

  instruction?

- In your ideal classroom, how would you teach reading?

- Who do you think are the good readers in your class? Why do you think so?

- What do you think your students generally think about reading? Why?

- Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about teaching reading?

Appendix F

Student Interview Protocol

Sample Student Interview Script and Questions

<u>Introduction and Assent Information</u>:

My name is Mrs. Osterbye and I'm a third grade teacher. You already know that I still go to college to learn more about teaching. Well, I have a big project that I'm working on. My project is about 2nd graders and reading. For part of my project, I want to ask kids like you what they think about reading because often no one asks kids. I want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers. I'd just like to know what you think and why. I'd like to talk to you about your ideas, but you don't have to say yes. You can say yes or no about talking to me and either one is okay. So, would you like to talk me about reading for my project? (Get verbal assent and document.)

- Tell me about reading this year in school. What do you like/don't like? Why?

- What kinds of things do you read in school?

- Do you read at home? What kinds of things do you read?

- What's your favorite book that you can read all by yourself?

- How do you like to read? By yourself? With a partner? In groups? Why?

- Do you remember learning to read? How did you learn to read?

- What kind of reader do you think you are? What makes you think that?

- When you are reading and come to something that's hard for you, what do you do? Why do you that? Is there anything else you would do?

- What have you been working on as a reader this year? Did you meet your goals?

- What is something you would like to do better as a reader? How do you think you can make that happen?

- Who is a good reader you know? What makes _____ a good reader?

- If _____ comes to something he/she doesn't know, what do you think he/she does?

- If you could choose any partner (from this class) to read with, who would you choose? Why?

- If you knew someone was having trouble reading, how would you help that person?

  If necessary, provide examples: don't know a word, their reading doesn't make

  sense, make a mistake reading

- What do you think a teacher would do to help that person?

- How would you know if someone was doing good reading? How could you tell if they

  are a good reader?

- So, what is good reading?

- Refer back to observation if possible.   For example: When your teacher did

  _____, did that help you? I noticed that you did _____ when you

  were reading in class. Tell me about that.

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you want to tell me about reading?