

TEACHERS' AND LOW-SOCIOECONOMIC-STATUS STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT
HIGH SCHOOL READING INSTRUCTION

By

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For Michelle, Autumn, and Anderson

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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By

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The purposes of this study were to describe the beliefs of students of low socioeconomic status (LSES) and high school English/reading teachers concerning high school reading instruction and to promote understanding among each group regarding reading assignments, teacher assistance, and assessment of reading skills. Participant views were expressed through a series of focus group discussions conducted at a high school in a poor rural community in the southeastern United States. Each of the three groups involved four LSES students and one reading intervention teacher, for a total of 12 students and 3 teachers. Thematic analysis was used to reduce the data, and discourse analysis was employed to examine how the views expressed may be socially situated.

The global theme was identified as barriers to remediation. The students generally feel excluded from these efforts because they are required to face texts that seem inaccessible to them, either because of the vocabulary or the subject matter, and because they do not receive the degree of individual instruction that they desire. They also feel oppressed by a system that requires them to experience remediation in such a manner and that applies ongoing and intense pressure to attain a minimum standardized test score that seems unattainable to many of them, given their deficiencies and how those deficiencies are addressed.

The teachers feel impeded in their efforts to help the students by a variety of issues. They must cope with poor attendance, student transience, having too many students in class, classroom management problems, a lack of autonomy, and working with students who are reading far below their grade level. They are especially concerned about having little opportunity to individualize their instruction through one-on-one and small group instruction, and they struggle with motivating students who generally resist the remediation program, often by avoiding reading activities and assessments, including the FCAT, through disengagement and underperformance. One teacher, in particular, believes that teaching reading in isolation is largely ineffective.

The students seem to be using the following discourses: (1) being a student, (2) coping through retreat, (3) coping through distraction, (4) coping through rejection, (5) success through personal coaching, (6) success through addressing deficits, (7) success through breaking it down, (8) success through meeting us at our level, (9) responding to pressure with nervousness, and (10) responding to pressure through avoidance. The teachers seem to be using several other discourses: (1) being a teacher, (2) blaming the system, (3) blaming the student, (4) claiming to be inadequately prepared, (5) advocating for students by conveying their feelings, (6) advocating for students by defending their interests, and (7) defining effective secondary reading instruction and assessment. Finally, I used the discourse of being an academic researcher. All of the discourses, aside from being a student, being a teacher, and being an academic researcher, relate in one way or another to coping with the realities of reading instruction.

The students and teachers construct their realities of high school reading remediation through both politics (social goods) and sign systems and knowledge. The participants see the social good demanded by the FCAT program as information processing skills which are deemed

by the state as necessary for graduation and for economic self-sufficiency in American society. They also share that students are not receiving a fair opportunity to obtain this good because of the characteristics of the system within which the state and Rural High School (and its district leadership) require it be delivered.

The participants state indirectly that American English text passages deemed by the state to be associated with high school reading levels are privileged over other forms of text, especially those in common use by the students themselves in their homes and subcultures, including the narrative texts they prefer to read. They also express indirectly an understanding that there are specific interpretations of the assigned texts regarded as appropriate by the state, and that these interpretations must be the focus of the students' comprehension efforts. They know that the students' decoding must arrive at these interpretations if it is to be considered valid by teachers, computer assessment preparation programs, and test booklet reviewers. Yet, they struggle with the irony of a system designed to offer remediation that is likely to ensure failure.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The nation's high school students are struggling with reading literacy. In 2005, according to test results, over one third of eighth-graders (soon-to-be freshmen) scored below the "basic" level, and over 70% scored below the "proficient" level according to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006, p. 5). These statistics indicate that many high school students may not be self-sufficient readers and, as a result, the quality of their emergent adult life may be in jeopardy. If their reading comprehension is really so poorly developed, it is likely that they will struggle to support themselves and to contribute meaningfully to society.

Life in developed countries demands text processing skills and a capacity for lifelong learning to stay current with the rapidity of social change. High school graduates must demonstrate that they can function in such a context. An effective measure of such preparedness includes indicators of their ability to read analytically, synthesize, and apply what they absorb. With these skills, young people become more likely to avoid lives of diminished economic capacity, self-sufficiency, and adaptability. Indeed, these are the conditions of the average member of a poverty community, and with them come dependency on government-sponsored welfare programs and a temptation towards crime as a solution. Researchers have illustrated the relationship between literacy and poverty (Denti & Guerin, 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003).

The reading comprehension skills of Florida high school students are comparable to national indicators of achievement. In 2005, 68% of tenth-graders scored below grade level on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (Florida Department of Education: FCAT, 2006a). At Rural High School (RHS) in Northeast Florida, the site of this

study, the faculty and administration have been struggling to help their students read at grade level since the FCAT was first administered in the spring of 1999.

To address this ongoing problem, school officials have: (1) eliminated elective courses in order to provide additional sections of remedial reading (and math) courses, (2) provided extensive training in literacy instruction to the faculty, (3) employed two full-time reading coaches to work with the faculty to improve reading instruction, (4) offered book talks to students, (5) created a faculty literacy council, (6) incorporated the Read 180 literacy program in some of the intensive reading classes (an intervention program for struggling readers involving daily lessons that include whole-group and rotating small-group sessions—see Florida Center for Reading Research, 2004, p. 1), (7) incorporated the Reading Counts literacy program in all of the intensive reading and English classes (a computer-based intervention program through which students select and read a book, take a quiz on the book, and receive immediate feedback on their performance—see Scholastic, 2007), (8) strove to improve student attendance, (9) maintained a reading campaign aimed at students and parents, and (10) developed a comprehensive action plan involving continued efforts for the next school year (RHS reading coach, personal communication, February 17, 2006; *Southern Association of Colleges and Schools*, 2004, pp. 5, 9, 80-90).

The need for these efforts is more explicitly illustrated by the RHS FCAT score table (see Table 1-1 at the end of this chapter). This table displays the percentage of students who scored at level three or above (an indication that a student is reading at grade level or higher) by student subgroups. The figures indicate that for 2005, most Black and Hispanic students, students with special needs (enrolled in special education), and those on the federal free/reduced lunch program demonstrated that they were reading below grade level.

Specifically, only 9 of 153 Black students, 2 of 15 Hispanic students, 1 of 43 students with special needs, and 19 of 192 students on the free/reduced lunch program passed the test. Considering that the state's objective is that only 31% of each subgroup attain a grade level reading score (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p. 31), the performance gaps are alarming. Of note is that the percentage of those students classified as not on the federal free/reduced lunch program—those more economically advantaged—who attained at least a level three is equal to the state's objective (67 of 216 passed), as is the percentage of White students who passed the exam (73 of 236). Understanding the instructional experiences of LSES students in the remedial classes and those of the teachers who provide instruction may offer insight into why FCAT scores for minority and LSES students remain so low.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were to describe the beliefs of LSES students and high school English/reading teachers concerning high school reading instruction and to promote understanding among each group regarding reading assignments, teacher assistance, and assessment of reading skills.

Research Questions

1. How do the participants describe the reading instruction they experience, including their desires and struggles, and their responses to those struggles?
2. How do the students, the teachers, and the researcher-as-participant co-construct the meaning they derive from their experiences?
3. What societal discourses drive the students' and teachers' views of reading instruction and what are the implications?

Definition of Terms

- Low socioeconomic status (LSES): Refers to students who qualify for the federal government's program for free and reduced-price school lunch (see Levine & Levine, 1996, p. 12).

- Reading comprehension: Refers to students' ability to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and apply printed text (see Guthrie, 2005).
- Student: Refers to an LSES adolescent who is enrolled in a course largely devoted to the teaching of reading comprehension. This student may also be described as low achieving and/or at risk.
- Teacher: Refers to a high school educator who teaches reading comprehension as a major component of her curriculum.

Significance of the Study

Much of the research about teacher beliefs has been directed toward areas other than high school literacy instruction. Moreover, research on teacher beliefs within the context of literacy instruction has primarily been conducted at the early childhood and elementary school levels. When teacher beliefs at the high school level have been studied, there has been little attention been paid to instruction within the English classroom, where current reading improvement efforts are usually focused, and to literacy instruction in particular. Thus there has been a void in research that considers the reading crisis among LSES high school students, and both teachers' and students' voices in this context remain largely unknown. The findings of this study will provide insight into LSES high school students' reading realities and their teachers' experiences as they grapple with helping remedial readers attain adequate levels of achievement as measured by the FCAT.

Despite comprehensive efforts by school personnel to address reading literacy development statewide, LSES students continue to struggle with reading comprehension. As another indicator of the breadth of the problem, the number of students (including non-LSES) who have attained at least a level three has fallen by 11 percentage points from 2003 to 2005 (Florida Department of Education, 2006a). An examination of student and teacher beliefs about reading instruction may help to provide insight into the continuing problem. For example, it is possible that teachers may either hold beliefs about literacy instruction that do not facilitate

student success (e.g., Albright, 2001; Asselin, 2000; Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2004; Lewis & Wray, 1999; Meltzer, Katzer-Cohen, Miller, & Roditi, 2001; Tatto, 1999; Thames & York, 2003), or they may teach in ways that are inconsistent with their convictions (e.g., Hofer, 2002; Larrivee, 2000; McCombs, 2002; Minstrell & Anderson, 2002; Schraw & Olafson, 2002; Yung, 2001). Students, on the other hand, may also hold views about literacy instruction that serve to impede their success (Ericson, 2001; Guthrie, 2005; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2005; Nagle, 1999; “Transforming High Schools,” 2004). Moreover, both teachers and students may gain a deeper understanding of how best to approach reading instruction by becoming aware of each other’s perspectives and their own.

While changes in teacher practice and student engagement are not likely to occur within the relatively short timeframe of this study, the work will bring this issue to the consciousness of the participants (and to a wider educator audience through dissemination of study results) by creating an occasion for self-reflection and providing them with an opportunity to improve reading instruction and performance.

Table 1-1. FCAT reading results by the percentage of students who scored at level three and above: 2005 RHS demographic results

	Total number taking the exam	Number who passed**	% ≥ 3
All students	411	86	21
White	236	73	31
Black	153	9	6
Hispanic	15	2	13
Asian/Pacific Islander	5		*
Multiracial/ethnic	2		*
Special needs (not gifted)	43	1	2
Free/reduced lunch	192	19	10
Not free/reduced lunch	216	67	31
Limited English proficient	5		*
Female	197	32	16
Male	214	56	26

*No data reported when fewer than 10 students tested. **Approximations based on multiplying the percentage provided by the total number provided. (Florida Department of Education, 2006b, School Demographic Report)

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literacy

Studies about teacher and LSES student beliefs related to high school literacy instruction are presented in this chapter. These studies along with related literature that are presented include the following topics: (1) literacy, (2) teacher beliefs, (3) self-efficacy, and (4) student and parent views.

Definitions

“Literacy” can be defined in a number of ways. Nagle (1999) describes literacy as the “community’s ways of using written language to serve social purposes” and “school literacy” as the “written and social language that is sanctioned in school” (“Theoretical background” section). Similar to Nagle’s view of school literacy is Luttrell and Parker’s (2001) statement that the English classroom is the “focal center of formal school literacy, and is where students are exposed to literacy practices that are supposed to orient them to their place in society” (p. 240). Moje (2000), however, states that school literacy also includes dress, “bearing,” age, and social positioning, which are “powerful discursive forms,” and that literacy practices include the values, beliefs, and actions that “people bring to reading and writing” (“A Note about Literacy and Literacy Practices” section). Donahue (2000) explains that secondary teachers should view reading as “a social activity of constructing meaning from prior knowledge, current experience, and information from a variety of texts” (“Experimenting with Texts” section).

One can see how each definition could significantly influence classroom literacy instruction. The teacher who holds Donahue’s view would apply a constructivist approach to teaching. On the other hand, the instructor who follows Moje’s perspective would allow for a variety of student engagements with text, accommodating culture-based preferences.

Unfortunately, what many teachers convey to students, although often indirectly, is Nagle's notion of "school literacy," involving "written and social language that is sanctioned in school." This perspective of course excludes other forms of language that children may bring to the class, such as Ebonics, often rejected by educators as a form of nonstandard English, but which E. B. Moje (personal communication, July 17, 2004) describes as:

a regular language practice tied to a particular cultural group. . . . a language system, complete with rules, norms, etc. . . . although Ebonics may be used deliberately to resist dominant language conventions, it is more often engaged in as part of regular language practice rather than as an overt act of resistance.

School-sanctioned literacy practices have also led students to define literacy as "text-based" and to believe that they "were not good readers if they did not like or do well in school reading and writing" and that their private literacies have no value (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, pp. 237, 242-245). As a teacher defines "literacy," she engages in a process of boundary-making. She may encourage student construction of meaning or simple reception of information, and she may allow for a variety of engagements with text or insist on mainstream interaction. She may incorporate multiculturalism, or she may gravitate toward dominant cultural values. She will, in effect, determine the degree of inclusion and exclusion that applies to what she deems appropriate literacy instruction.

Working with Struggling Readers

The role of the high school teacher in working with struggling readers is controversial. Rubenstein-Avila (2003) states that "one's stance toward literacy affects how one defines a struggling reader" (p. 291) and argues that "beliefs about what counts as literacy shape definitions, philosophical assumptions, and ultimately pedagogy" (p. 292). Skolnick (2000) explains that the teacher's "inner life" is an "unacknowledged curriculum" and that her values and beliefs emerge through her "every action in subtle and unexpected ways" (p. 89). What

teachers believe about literacy instruction can indeed be seen as a hidden curriculum that influences how their students learn and what they experience in the classroom. This hidden curriculum may be the key to improving high school reading instruction in particular.

Policy-maker beliefs about literacy and struggling readers have certainly played a role in the pursuit of standardized testing. In his discussion of high-stakes testing, Guthrie (2005) outlines five common teacher reactions to the current focus on tests: (1) feeling responsible, embarrassed, and angry about test score publicity, (2) questioning the test's validity, (3) believing that children are adversely affected by testing on an emotional level, (4) feeling frustrated with the impact of testing on instruction, and/or (5) adapting to the tests (p. 286). He also explains that teachers may be either "learning-oriented" (emphasizing "understanding of major content themes" and teaching "reading skills that can be used widely") or "performance-oriented" ("concerned with test scores, student achievement, and external evaluations") (p. 292). This latter view is commonly held by teachers who struggle to cope with the pressures of testing. In her own negative judgment about standardized tests, Skolnick (2000) contends, "Passing a test doesn't tell us whether a child chooses to read, has the ability to select appropriate books, or has an awareness of the metacognitive aspects of being a reader" (p. 122).

Ericson (2001) describes traditional views of the role of high school English teachers in reading instruction, secondary reading in general, and current views on the importance of reading elicited from preservice and inservice teachers in her Content Area Literacy, Methods of Teaching English, and Literature Issues courses. She states that they see themselves as literature, composition, and grammar teachers, not reading teachers. Ericson also says that they have assumed that their students come to them already knowing how to read (p. 1). In the past,

secondary reading has been viewed as “a collection of reading comprehension skills” (p. 14).

According to her students, though, reading:

1. “lets us experience lives in other times and in other places.”
2. “allows us to stretch and exercise our imaginations.”
3. “lets us learn, giving us power.”
4. “develops empathy and understanding of others.”
5. “lets us escape.”
6. “shows us how others have handled situations similar to our own, or see how others have coped with difficult circumstances.”
7. “lets us know how the world was, how it is, and how it might be.
8. “inspires us to be better human beings and citizens.”
9. “lets us have fun and can make us laugh.” (pp. 19-20)

She says that these statements reflect why high school English teachers should consider themselves teachers of reading (p. 20). Christenbury (2001) contends that high school reading efforts are undermined by teachers when they (1) do not provide time for actual reading during the school day, (2) do not talk with students about their own reading, (3) restrict what is acceptable reading material to specific genres, and (4) focus too much on simple recall of information (pp. 156-157). Maybe, the views of Ericson’s students are being compromised by attempts to cope with classroom realities, as perhaps evidenced by Christenbury’s observations.

Additionally, Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, and Vacca (2004) assert that effective adolescent literacy teachers “focus on strengths, especially of marginalized students, using alternative pedagogical practices that offer adolescents opportunities to draw from multiple forms of text to develop understandings and points of view” (p. 308). According to literacy research, “Effective instruction will attend to older students’ perceptions of competence, their

ability to make personal connections, their participation, and their development of search and comprehension strategies that are embedded in context” (p. 308). Yet, Nagle (1999) states that her study of working-class students’ literacy backgrounds revealed that the competitive atmosphere of the participants’ high school and the privileging of middle-class literacy histories served as literacy barriers to these students. She questions why cooperative learning is not continued beyond middle school (“Summary of the findings” section).

Efforts to improve high school reading instruction have been resisted by some teachers because they believe that the responsibility for such teaching lies elsewhere, as in the lower grades. For example, McGill-Franzen and Allington (2005) have found that (1) classroom teachers shifted primary responsibility for reading instruction to specialist teachers, (2) specialist teachers “rarely acknowledged accepting primary responsibility” for this instruction, (3) school principals did not accept responsibility for remedial and special education students, and (4) the categorical programs administrator assigned this responsibility to the principal (p. 178). The researchers argue that diffusion of responsibility leads to a lack of accountability for student progress (p. 179).

As stated earlier, a number of researchers have learned or otherwise maintain that teachers hold educational beliefs that are not conducive to effective teaching practices (e.g., Albright, 2001; Asselin, 2000; Comber & Cormack, 2005; Gunderson & Anderson, 2003; Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2004; Lewis & Wray, 1999; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2005; Tatto, 1999; Thames & York, 2003). In particular, McGill-Franzen and Allington (2005) have identified three “incorrect” assumptions concerning low reading achievement that sum up much of what has been learned about how teachers view this issue: (1) “children and their families are the problem,” (2) “specialists and separate programs are the

solution,” and (3) “children who find learning to read difficult are best served by a ‘slow it down and make it more concrete’ version of instruction” (p. 173). They also state:

Each of these wrong assumptions is at least implicit in the educational policies and regulatory statues [sic] that govern school programs for low achieving, poor, and minority children. These incorrect assumptions are the underpinnings of conventional wisdom about how best to teach these children to read and write. . . . we have relatively little evidence that our current efforts substantially alter the educational futures of at-risk children. (p. 173)

They conclude that in order to improve literacy instruction for low achieving children, educators will have to change the way they teach and what they believe about the capabilities of these students (p. 181).

Teacher Beliefs

There have been a plethora of studies about teacher beliefs. However, few of these studies have focused on the beliefs of teachers who provide high school literacy instruction. Most of the research on teacher beliefs within the context of literacy instruction has been directed at the early childhood and elementary school levels. The middle school has also received more coverage than the high school. When teacher beliefs at the high school level have been studied, relatively little attention has been paid to beliefs about literacy instruction. Little attention has also been paid to literacy instruction provided in English classes, where current reading improvement efforts are often focused.

Teacher Beliefs and Multiculturalism

According to Moje (2000), the literacy practices of “marginalized adolescents are often referred to in terms of deviance or resistance,” (Introduction). Gunderson and Anderson (2003) have explained that many North American educators share a “‘mainstream,’ middle-class perspective that reflects a Eurocentric bias, which holds that authentic literature, process writing, reader response, authentic assessment, and emergent literacy are central to literacy learning and

teaching” (p. 123). They add that teachers “seem to be convinced that students should become independent critical learners” (pp. 123-124). However, these ideas are not shared by many Americans, especially those from countries where education is not based on a “literacy-centered” theory of learning (p. 124). Gunderson and Anderson argue that “any effort to search out literacy universals or universal processes of literacy may itself be a thoroughly Western-oriented undertaking” (pp. 140-141). The North American literacy-based perspective often clashes with the viewpoints on learning of many immigrant families. The U.S. perspective calls upon children to question texts, yet this idea is a contradiction to students who have been taught to take texts at face value (pp. 140-141).

Baugh (2005) states that “extensive evidence confirms that many African Americans . . . speak nonstandard vernacular dialects of English that are stigmatized by the larger society, and often by the educational system” (p. 237). He contends that “any educational policy that builds on the notion that a dominant dialect is synonymous with the proper or correct dialect is misguided at its outset” (p. 237). Teachers, however, often employ the “socio-centric” view of schooling described by Street (2005) as tending to “privilege home and social background as the major factor in explaining children’s achievement at school” (p. 244). Therefore, they often relieve themselves of having a responsibility for teaching within the context of Black English, or Ebonics. They commonly see it as a dialect that must be rejected as an inappropriate nonstandard form of English and corrected (refer to earlier description of Ebonics by E. B. Moje).

In her study of 384 general education teachers at the elementary and middle school levels, working and living in a middle-class community, Tournaki (2003) discovered that the participants’ predictions of student academic and social success were influenced by the student

characteristics of gender, reading achievement, social behavior, and attentiveness. Their predictions were influenced by both relevant and irrelevant information, the latter of which “may unduly place students at greater risk for failure in the general education setting” (“Discussion” section). Luttrell and Parker (2001) found that high school teachers’ perceptions of student potentials were often influenced by the teachers’ identification of the students’ culture and social status (pp. 240-242). They state that “what seems most crucial for educators to understand is that students’ positions within their figured worlds [cultural/social places of existence] need not be equated with their dispositions” (p. 245).

Teacher Beliefs and LSES/At-Risk Students

In his study of the literacy histories of 20 vocational high school students, Nagle (1999) found that working-class students were disempowered by school literacy practices, which effectively perpetuated the peer social hierarchy. He claims that his study implies that middle class teachers assume that “literacy is a birthright of all who attend school in the United States. . . that all students who come to school will have had some experience with school literacy practices at home” (“Summary of the findings” section). The author explains that many of the students in his study had not been exposed by their families to the “middle class value that everyone reads to their children” and that they “felt like outsiders at school from their earliest experiences” (“Summary of the findings” section). Moje (2000) and Luttrell and Parker (2001) similarly found LSES and at-risk children effectively excluded from the mainstream educational experience via their lack of acceptable literacy development. Within this context, Troutman, Unger, Ramirez, and Saddler (2001) state that individual agency is socially determined—not the property of the individual, as is commonly communicated in mainstream American culture (pp. 211-212, 216). They explain that socioeconomic status largely determines the literacy experiences available to children (p. 214).

Teacher Beliefs and Instruction

Teachers have certain beliefs concerning classroom instruction and related issues, and these views often impact their classroom practices. Skolnick (2000), for example, differentiates between teaching by will and teaching through imagination:

When the teacher relates to the curriculum as a body of knowledge that she will teach through her own determination and domination, that relationship is rigid and fragile. Teaching by imagination [however] envisions possibilities. The mind is open and creatively alert. Opportunities for connectedness abound and the relationship between the teacher and the curriculum blossoms. (p. 91)

Teaching by will, as described above, has been the traditional approach to American education and is still commonly employed in K-12 settings, while the constructivist approach to teaching by imagination is becoming more widely accepted as more appropriate (also see Eisner, 2001). According to Duffy (2005), the best teachers use “both transmission and constructivist models simultaneously” within a single lesson (p. 321). Similarly, in her discussion of her success in her 12th-grade English classroom, Schauwecker (2001) credits her flexibility and her willingness to “change directions frequently,” depending on how her students respond to her instruction (p. 67).

Schraw (2001) explains that teachers model their beliefs for their students and that as their beliefs become more sophisticated, so do their thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, their instructional decisions are influenced by their beliefs, which is echoed by Anderson (2000, p. 189) and Yung (2002, p. 98). Alsup and Bush (2003) maintain that a teacher should work from a “philosophical base” and that her philosophy and pedagogy operate reciprocally, with philosophy guiding pedagogy and pedagogy modifying belief (p. 3). Schraw indicates, however, that the sophistication of a teacher’s “philosophical base” may depend on her field, with those working in the “hard sciences” reporting more sophisticated beliefs than those who work in education and the humanities (p. 458).

With regard to gender views in particular, Hubbard and Datnow (2000) found that when the nature of an educational reform seemed to reflect a gendered identity, it likely faced resistance by men (“Gender Identity and Support for Reform” section). Specifically, their study revealed that gender socialization led men to be “less willing to embrace reform efforts that asked them to extend their teaching role from subject specialist to a nurturing caretaker of students” (“Conclusion” section). Gender indeed may continue to play a prominent role in education, not only in student-student interactions and teacher-student interactions, but among the faculty as well, influencing school reform in the process.

As educators and policy-makers pursue efforts to improve teaching and learning, they must address the impact of teacher beliefs on reform. In her proposal of the use of her Cognitive-Affective Model of Conceptual Change, Gregoire (2003) states that how teachers perceive a reform—as either a challenge or a threat—largely dictates whether they will work to implement the reform (meet the challenge) or avoid it (the threat) (p. 167). And, through his study of teacher implementation of a school-based assessment program, Yung (2002) concluded that teachers who view policy change critically are able to control their instruction (p. 115). Again, teachers’ perceptions can hold great sway over how teachers perform, often leading them to feel either challenged or threatened, either autonomous or bound, when facing reform. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) have suggested that curriculum workers need to consider their attitudes and beliefs as formative, “subject to reexamination” and change as new evidence warrants (p. 33). An instructor’s study of her own teaching philosophy is critical to improving her instruction since it “influences, and to a large extent determines, our educational decisions, choices, and alternatives” (pp. 31-32). How can teachers determine if they are operating with integrity if they have not identified and explored their own philosophies of education? How can they otherwise

discover belief-practice inconsistencies that are adversely impacting their instruction? How can they learn whether their perspectives are appropriate for addressing the needs of their students, especially those who come from different backgrounds?

Teacher Belief-Practice Discrepancies

Several authors have determined or otherwise argue that teachers have held beliefs that were inconsistent with their classroom practice (e.g., Behar-Horenstein, Mitchell, & Dolan, 2005; Christenbury, 2001; Fung & Chow, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Hofer, 2002; Larrivee, 2000; McCombs, 2002; Minstrell & Anderson, 2002; Schraw & Olafson, 2002; Yung, 2001). The process for leading teachers to become aware of this dissonance begins with study of the self.

A number of researchers assert that teacher self-reflection is critical to the transformation of instructional practice (e.g., Bean & Stevens, 2002; Brown, 1999; Duffy, 2005; Duto, Fisk, Koch, Roop, & Wixon, 2002; Howard, McGee, Schwartz, & Purcell, 2000; Larrivee, 2000; Middleton, 2002; Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000; Pape & Hoy, 2002; Sharp, 2003; Yung, 2001). Some teachers may resist reflecting on their beliefs and assumptions about teaching, learning, their students, and their actual classroom practices, and may resist seeking to improve their performance. However, teachers' awareness of discrepancies between their beliefs and their actions may lead to their seeking congruence by changing either or both. They may feel compelled to eliminate the internal dissonance they encounter when they learn that they are not teaching with integrity, that they are either not actually doing what they believe is best for their students or holding inappropriate educational views.

For some, self-reflection may help to identify internal or external barriers to belief-practice congruency, such as a lack of knowledge, skills, experience, and support; a lack of time; personal framing/interpretation tendencies; assumptions; agendas; past experiences; feelings; expectations; mandated curricula and standardized testing programs; a system that does not

honor teachers or what they believe to be best for their students; a “lack of professional culture”; the school culture; and administrative impediments (Cheung & Wong, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Hofer, 2002; McCombs, 2002; Minstrell & Anderson, 2002; Pape & Hoy, 2002; Schraw and Olafson, 2002; Skandera & Sousa, 2003; Yung, 2001). Once teachers identify these barriers to belief implementation, they are in a position to devise a strategy for either removing them or accommodating them in a more productive manner. As this process unfolds and benefits manifest in improved student outcomes, a new field of study—teacher belief-practice dissonance—may emerge as a key area of interest in the national movement toward elevating adolescent literacy. Larrivee (2000) states that teachers’ value-driven expectations and their beliefs and assumptions about students can lead them to respond to students inappropriately (p. 299). Cheung and Wong make a case for studying teachers’ beliefs and practices, stating “since teacher beliefs are thought to drive classroom actions, pre-service or in-service activities that focus solely on teaching practices will not be effective unless the teachers’ curriculum orientations are also taken into account” (p. 227).

Self-Efficacy

What educators believe about their teaching capabilities (self-efficacy) influences their decisions about curriculum and instruction. According to Bandura (1995), a person’s perceived self-efficacy refers to someone’s belief in his ability to take appropriate action when faced with a specific situation (p. 2). Ashton and Webb (1986) differentiate between sense of “teaching efficacy” and sense of “personal teaching efficacy” (p. 4). They define the former as “teachers’ expectations that teaching can influence student learning” and the latter as “individuals’ assessment of their own teaching competence” (p. 4). Through their study of education majors and inservice teachers, Long and Biggs (1999) learned that both groups attributed nearly half of the influence for a “successfully managed classroom” to the teacher (Introduction). They also

explain that teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy assign greater responsibility for learning on the students and “other nonschool factors” (Introduction). Enderlin-Lampe (2002) states that teachers must believe in their ability to effect change if their sense of efficacy is to be strengthened and change is to occur (pp. 142, 144). Moreover, Duffy (2005) contends that the most effective teachers confront their jobs by adjusting, modifying, adapting, and inventing (p. 322). The teachers Duffy describes have confidence in their abilities and rely on their own professional judgment to guide their work. They have a “vision”—they “assume control over instructional decision-making in order to achieve the mission” (p. 322), a mission that they establish, based on what they believe to be in the best interest of their students.

Yet, Gregoire (2003) states that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy have enjoyed “mastery experiences in helping students learn” (p. 167). She explains that a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy may also be strengthened through “verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological and affective states” (p. 167). Milner’s (2002) case study of a high school English teacher supports Gregoire’s ideas concerning “verbal persuasion” and “affective states.”

Specifically, Milner provides an account of a teacher, Mrs. Albright, who overcame a significant professional crisis—when several students and their parents questioned her ability to teach an advanced English course—by choosing to see the situation as a challenge rather than a defeat. And, she was able to do this through a strong sense of self-efficacy developed through positive feedback from students and parents and a sense of feeling respected by her colleagues, both within and outside her department. She had earlier received criticism from “bright” students and their parents for not providing enough academic challenge, for not being “hard enough.” She began questioning her ability to teach because she believed she had been doing her best. Although she initially felt “hurt” and “angry,” she began to feel encouraged after receiving

positive feedback from colleagues and other students and parents, boosting her confidence. She then decided to “step up to the plate” by increasing the rigor of her assignments and by becoming more “rigid” in her grading, challenges which her students rose to meet (“A Crisis Situation for Mrs. Albright” and “Sources of Persistence through a Crisis” sections). Milner states that “theory may consider an in-the-meantime source of efficacy as most significant to efficacy until a mastery experience occurs, [with] more attention...paid to sources of teacher self-efficacy that guide teachers’ thinking about their abilities until mastery experiences occur” (“Conclusions” section). Mrs. Albright gained mastery through her effectively overcoming the criticism of her teaching abilities.

Student and Parent Views about Literacy

Students also have their own views about literacy, instruction, and how their teachers perform. Their views are likely to affect the learning process. In his interviews of working class students, Nagle (1999) found that their literacy backgrounds led them to be excluded from mainstream literacy practices in school and that they felt disempowered (“Summary of the findings” section). Ericson (2001) has learned that students think they are “either good readers or poor readers, and that there’s little in between” (p. 2). Lesesne and Buckman (2001) state that the “chief complaint” of the students they surveyed was that “teachers did not seem to know any good books for them to read” and that students “want teachers who care about what students want to read, who ask for book suggestions, and who read books recommended by students” (pp. 103, 105). Luttrell and Parker (2001), however, learned that boys at the high school they studied often described reading and writing as “‘girl’ activities” and stated that girls “are better readers.” They found that both genders reported that “athletes are not readers” (pp. 237-238).

Meltzer, Katzer-Cohen, Miller, and Roditi (2001) found that teachers viewed students with learning disabilities more negatively in their “strategy use, academic performance, and

organization” than the students viewed themselves in these areas (p. 85). They speculated that the students may be working harder than these teachers realize, regardless of their apparent use of strategies and their performance (p. 96). Moreover, in one study of ten Boston high schools, 56 % of the students reported that they “did not believe that their teachers really cared about them” (“Transforming High Schools,” 2004, p. 4).

According to Guthrie (2005), middle and high school students often react negatively to standardized assessment programs. Some students believe that the tests serve the school’s interests rather than their own, and some protect their self-esteem by deliberately withholding effort on such tests. The latter can then argue that they could have tried harder if they had wanted to do so. And, low achieving students are “likely to feel resentment, anxiety, lack of appropriate test-taking strategies, and decreasing motivation” (pp. 286-287). These obstacles to test performance may hinder student engagement with texts in general if they negatively associate reading with testing.

Parents also bring their own beliefs to bear on the literacy experiences of their children. McGill-Franzen and Allington (2005) cited a 1989 study that revealed poor and middle-class families’ perceptions of schooling that still seem to apply today. According to the study:

Poorer families . . . believed that the curriculum was the purview of the school, that it was the teacher’s job to teach, not the parents’. The parents’ job . . . was to “ready” the child for school, to make sure that the child was well fed, clothed, and on time for school. These parents did not think that they were qualified to teach the curriculum to their children, even when the school requested that they do so to bolster the achievement of a child who was falling behind. (p. 175)

These views of schooling are consistent with the current common lack of literacy support at home. Many lower-class parents may believe that the teacher alone is responsible for teaching their children to read. Middle-class parents interviewed in the same study, however, shared different perspectives:

[They] believed themselves to be the teacher's professional equal: parents were knowledgeable about grade-level curriculum and about the strengths and weaknesses of their child's teacher. In the case of low achieving children, middle class parents were able to supplement an inadequate instructional program and compensate for a weak or incompetent teacher by obtaining tutoring (or teaching the children themselves) outside the school. (p. 174)

These latter views also still apply and help to explain the continued gap in achievement between lower-class and middle-class children and the types of parent involvement that emerge from these social classes.

Summary

LSES students are struggling to read. For the most part, teachers have not facilitated an improvement in their performance—a crisis especially evident in the English classroom. What teachers believe about how best to teach reading may be a significant underlying cause. While researchers have studied teacher beliefs and a variety of other related issues extensively, they have not focused on teacher perspectives and their influence on instruction within this particular context. To understand what is driving the continued reading struggles of LSES students, their voices and their teachers' will be the foci of this study.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

The purposes of this study were to describe the beliefs of students of low socioeconomic status (LSES) and high school English/reading teachers concerning high school reading instruction and to promote understanding among each group regarding reading assignments, teacher assistance, and assessment of reading skills. The participants were recruited from a single site, a rural Florida high school. The school's reading coach selected the participating teachers, who in turn, selected the students based on the criteria described below. The students and teachers then engaged in a series of focus group discussions, which were recorded and analyzed thematically and with a focus on discourse. These processes are discussed in detail below according to the following topics: (1) overview, (2) theoretical perspective, (3) subjectivity statement, (4) methods, (5) validity in qualitative studies, (6) reliability in qualitative studies, (7) establishing validity in this study, and (8) limitations.

Overview

Through this study, the beliefs of high school students of low socioeconomic status and their reading intervention teachers concerning reading instruction have been described. Their beliefs were shared through focus group discussions of the following topics:

Discussion 1: Reading activities and assignments

Discussion 2: Teacher help

Discussion 3: Reading assessment

Three groups were created. The groups consisted of a reading intervention teacher, four of her LSES students, and me (3 teachers and 12 students total). Each group met three times, and each meeting was devoted to one of the topics, in the order indicated above. I served as both the moderator and a participant. After all of the meetings were concluded, I conducted a member-

check discussion with each group. The objectives of this study were to have both students and teachers share their perspectives on these issues and to promote understanding of reading instruction among both groups. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the participants describe the reading instruction they experience, including their desires and struggles, and their responses to those struggles?
2. How do the students, the teachers, and the researcher-as-participant co-construct the meaning they derive from their experiences?
3. What societal discourses drive the teachers' and students' views of reading instruction and what are the implications?

Theoretical Perspective: Social Constructionism

The Researcher's View

I believe that through our interaction with other people, we create our own realities upon which we base assumptions that drive our judgments and decision making. Indeed, aspects of our truth are formed socially, as we test ideas on one another and assimilate or accommodate the notions of others, sometimes negotiating to form entirely new schemas through which we come to know our environments and ourselves. We invent conceptual systems which we use to interpret our experiences, and these systems and the realities that we create are inextricably situated temporally and historically. Regardless of whether we are conscious of it, what we believe to be true today may be later unfounded by those who construct new realities. In other words, the knowledge that we produce is tentative—always subject to redefinition as human beings continue to build realities through their exchange of ideas and reinterpret what has previously been taken for granted.

If we are the creators of knowledge, our perspectives cannot be viewed as neutral—objectivity is in the eye of its designer. To be sure, the reader could contend that the view

described by this entire discussion is yet another human-made reality. The point is that there is no way for human beings to step outside of this knowledge generation loop and critique it from a neutral vantage point (see Crotty, 1998; Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Kincheloe, 2005; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2004).

I also believe that culture and power have contributed significantly to my reality. Social mores, views of the other, Christianity, capitalism—much of what constitutes Western society has seemed natural to me because these ideas, systems, and worldviews were presented to me that way throughout my life by powerful propagators of such knowledge, including family, church, school, government, and the mass media. One could argue that I am a product of my society—created by systems of thought, reflecting them. But, I have participated in my construction through my own sense making, through my own interpretations of my experiences. If I form meanings that deviate from those presented to me from the aforementioned sources, I may arrive at those meanings only through great effort since Western society is a homogenizing force that loathes resistance (Kincheloe, 2005).

Definitions and Key Concepts

Because of how I view reality and its construction, I have based this study on the epistemology of constructionism and on the theoretical perspective of social constructionism.

Crotty (1998) describes constructionism as follows:

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. . . . In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning. (pp. 8-9)

Consistent with this epistemology is the view that meaning is constructed socially. Berger and Luckmann (1967) define social constructionism as follows.

The sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for “knowledge” in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such “knowledge.” And insofar as all human “knowledge” is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted “reality” congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality. (p. 3)

The authors also explain that society strives to maintain its institutions through legitimization efforts (via education) applied to new generations. If members of a new generation possess an internalized reality that differs from the artificial reality the society seeks to create for them, the society will endeavor to transform their subjective realities through further socialization efforts (pp. 62, 69-70, 92-94, 143, 156-157; see also Bruner, 2003, p. 169; Gergen and Wortham, 2001, p. 119). Such efforts include the imposition of a culture-specific “moral order,” a set of standards for acceptable thought and behavior that we commonly accept as our own, perhaps until we begin to examine how it is transmitted to us through our social systems and institutions, through the mechanics of how our civilization is perpetuated (Gergen, 2003a, pp. 15-16).

In the construction of meaning, the relational self must also be considered. Gergen (2003a) states that we are “made up of each other,” that we are “mutually constituting” (p. 138). This idea is based on the following arguments. The meaning of human utterances is created through a “dialogic relationship.” The individual “carries past dialogues into the present, thinks in dialogue,” and is recreated through dialogue (p. 131). When someone perceives meaning, she at once takes a position on that meaning. When she wishes to generate meaning, she performs her utterances through intonation, facial expression, gestures, and other forms of body language. She delivers her ideas against a specific cultural backdrop, “carrying a history of relationships, manifesting them, expressing them.” She considers the other in the very formulation of her expression, varying her delivery according to the receiver (pp. 132-133). Gergen also contends that even memory itself is “socially distributed,” with “correct” memories posited by a carrier

(e.g., a teacher) into the mind of a targeted receiver (e.g., a student), via conversation and a variety of media, including textbooks, radio, television, film, and the Internet. Through the social distribution of memory, history can be shaped and reconstructed (p. 135; see also Bruner, 2003, pp. 169-170, for a discussion of the interactional nature of making meaning; Gergen, 2003b, and Gergen & Gergen, 2003, for further discussion of the relational self; and Gergen and Wortham, 2001, pp. 118-121). Meaning and the self are derived from relationship—they are communal constructs.

Realities held by the participants may also be shaped by transformative dialogue. While the Western concept of individual responsibility drives the members of this society to assign blame when they identify problems, they may instead employ a perspective of “relational responsibility” to facilitate mutual understanding, the formation of new meanings, and the appreciation of common ground. This can be pursued through a variety of methods, including constructing the other as one who carries many voices, blaming a “particular pattern of relating,” couching individual fault in the context of group differences, and seeking systemic causes rather than attempting to locate individual guilt. Moreover, a person’s views may be more openly received if delivered through storytelling rather than statements of abstract ideas and if she affirms the other in the process, through “co-constituting coordination.” She may use “coordinating rhythm,” which is “to respond to a smile with a smile...to carry the other’s tone of voice,” to express in one’s clothing something of the formality or informality of the other’s style,” etc. She may also employ “coordinating discourse,” which involves “moving toward mutuality in language” through “linguistic shading...[or] the substitution of a word (or phrase) with a near equivalent,” which allows for “an array of different associations, new ranges of meaning, and fresh conversational openings” (Gergen, 2003a, pp. 154-161).

Ultimately, these efforts could lead to self-reflexivity, in which someone questions his own views. People are able to do this because they are “polyvocal,” participating in many relationships and adapting their voices to a variety of contexts. They can learn to challenge their own positions, seeking out voices of doubt that they otherwise suppress in the course of argument. This approach lays the foundation for dialogic “imaginary moments,” in which participants jointly envision new realities, helping each to “redefine the other as ‘us’” (Gergen, 2003a, pp. 162-163).

Social Constructionism Applied

With regard to this study, social constructionism applies to the problem being examined, the research method, and the data analysis. Although the students’ reading literacy abilities are judged according to their performance on the FCAT, the cultural context of meaning-making varies among the students, their teachers and school administrators, Florida’s education policy-makers, and those involved in designing the test itself. The variation of socio-economic status alone potentially plays a significant role in how a student, a teacher, and a test author process the same reading passage. Moreover, when taking the test, the students are restricted to sense-making in isolation from their peers and their teacher, which compromises their ability to construct meaning socially.

The focus group interview was employed as the primary method of data collection. The students, teachers, and I co-constructed the realities of high school reading instruction, as experienced by those involved. As we discussed the various issues at play, and I conducted member checks with the groups after we completed the scheduled discussions, we shaped what emerged as transcript data. Throughout my interactions with the participants, I endeavored to coordinate the rhythm and discourse through my speech (tone, inflection, “linguistic shading”), facial expressions, gestures, other forms of body language (striving to appear open, welcoming,

warm, neutral), my dress (casual), and through my efforts to moderate the discussion (striving to give voice to all the participants). In other words, I attempted to facilitate an inviting, open, comfortable, and honest series of discussions so that the data might more closely reflect the participants' thoughts.

The use of thematic and discourse analysis methods are also consistent with social constructionism. The themes emerged from a plurality of voices (see Attride-Stirling, 2001). My identification of these themes was itself a co-constructive process. Discourse analysis is driven by interactivity, intersubjectivity (defined by Bruner, 2003, p. 169), and communal meaning. Through this method, the data are examined with an eye toward how those engaged in discussion participate in the construction of reality (Gee, 2005, pp. 10-11). Throughout the analysis, I considered my role in the generation of data.

Subjectivity Statement

I am a former teacher of high school English who served in a relatively poor rural community in the South. During my graduate studies, I have been trained in qualitative research methods and have co-authored qualitative studies currently in press. Because of the difficulties LSES students have encountered in learning to read and improving their comprehension skills, and the difficulties their teachers have had in helping them, I wanted to understand their realities. I wanted to understand how they viewed their struggles and what they believed would help to resolve them. I believed that if I could expose myself to new forms of knowledge, especially those that are usually marginalized, I would enrich my own reality and the realities of my audience—those who could share in my discoveries.

State and federal realities are being imposed on teachers, and those same realities along with those of teachers are being imposed on students. There is little tolerance from the power

blocs driving the current standards movement for resistance from either teachers or students.

Their voices are marginalized, even often silenced. Indeed, they may not even hear each other.

Through my work, I hoped to describe and communicate their realities to others, especially those who may be in a position to respond with solutions to the problems they are enduring. The participants may in fact be in the best position to resolve these issues. If there are assumptions that hinder reading development embedded in the teaching and learning situation under study, perhaps held by them, I wanted to bring tacit knowledge to a conscious level so that a new path to progress based on mutual understanding might be forged. Thus I hoped to become a student of the participants' realities so that I could become their advocate (Kincheloe, 2005; Fosnot, 2005; Fosnot & Perry, 2005; von Glasersfeld, 2005).

Methods

Participant Selection

Three faculty members who teach reading to LSES students as reading intervention instructors were recruited with the help of the school's reading coach. I asked these teachers to recommend four of their LSES students (n=12) for participation, using the following criteria:

- Diversity: African American, Latino/Latina, Caucasian (to reduce racial bias in the data)
- Representation of both genders (to reduce gender bias in the data)
- Engagement in class (students who participate in class and are capable of speaking cordially about the issues)
 - Awake and alert often enough to know what is happening in class
 - Vocal
 - Verbally interacts with other students, even if she does not read aloud or answer lesson-related questions
- Enrolled in the federal free-and-reduced-price lunch program (a measure of whether a student may be considered LSES)

- Attends class/school regularly, is not frequently assigned to in-school suspension
- Verbally competent, socially adept, and willing to engage in discussion (the data would be driven by the participants' voices)

The teachers were also asked not to select students who were turning 18 during the data collection stage (a student turning 18 during this period would impact the informed consent process per the Institutional Review Board).

Setting and Demographics

RHS is a public comprehensive high school, grades 9 through 12, situated in a poor rural community in the North Florida region. The school has an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students, 42% of whom receive free and reduced-price lunch, and has a 39% minority population (Florida Department of Education, 2006c, 2006d). In the surrounding community, the median household income in 2003 was \$28,613, the percentage of persons living below the poverty level in 2003 was 18.7%, and the median value of owner-occupied housing units in 2000 was \$68,500 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

Participants

The participants included 3 White female faculty members, Mrs. Hoskins, Mrs. Otero, and Mrs. Thompson (pseudonyms) who teach their high school's reading intervention course, titled Intensive Reading. Mrs. Hoskins has taught at the high school level for several years, however, this is her second year of teaching Intensive Reading. Mrs. Otero taught at the elementary school level for several years before joining the faculty of Rural High School. She is in her first year of teaching Intensive Reading. Mrs. Thompson has been teaching for two years, both at RHS as a teacher of Intensive Reading. The students, all of whom were participating in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program at the time of this study and enrolled in Intensive Reading, are listed below, grouped according to their teacher, and identified by pseudonyms (4 students per

teacher, n = 12; see Table 3-1). Their genders, races, and grade levels are also provided (see Table 3-2). For summary demographic statistics, see Table 3-3 (these tables are provided at the end of this chapter). Each of these students had previously failed the reading portion of FCAT, thereby failing to demonstrate grade-level reading comprehension as measured by passing this test.

Qualitative Interviews

Researchers interview people to gather information from them about things that cannot be directly observed. For example, thoughts, feelings, and intentions cannot be observed, nor can past behaviors, situations that preclude the researcher's presence, or how people have constructed their worldviews. Through interviewing, the researcher can access another person's perspective, operating under the assumption that the other's perspective can be known and is meaningful (Patton, 2002, pp. 340-341; see also Gubrium & Holstein, 2002a, p. 3; Kvale, 1996, pp. 1-2). Interviews are used to collect data for a variety of purposes, including, but not limited to, employee selection, journalism, mental health therapy, social casework, criminal investigation, market research, political polling, and academic research (see Platt, 2002, for a history of the interview).

Forms of interviewing include (1) the survey (a face-to-face exchange, with the interviewer gathering specific information); (2) qualitative and in-depth interviewing (a less structured, more exploratory exchange that is theoretically based and aimed at gaining access to the interviewee's perspective and experiences and at understanding her; while the qualitative interview is "focused on the 'qualities' of the respondent's experiences," the in-depth interview is targeted at "'deep disclosure'" that allows for exploration of emotion) (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002b, p. 57); (3) the life story interview (which may be either naturalistic, involving a "search for meaning and pattern within respondents' lives," or constructivist, involving the "mechanisms of co-

construction that take place as the interview encounter unfolds) (p. 58); and (4) focus group interviewing, in which the aim is to “explore the range and depth of shared meanings in an area” (p. 58). Yet another view of interviewing—the postmodern—blurs the distinction between interviewer and respondent and reverses or combines these roles in a treatment of conversations as reflexive, with the premise being that “answers raise new questions and, in turn, become the basis for eliciting new answers” (p. 58).

Types of interviews include (1) the informal conversational interview, in which the questions “emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things” (Patton, 2002, p. 349); (2) the interview guide approach, in which “topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form...[and] the interviewer decides sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview” (p. 349); (3) the standardized open-ended interview—“the exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance,” the same questions are posed to all interviewees and in the same order, and the questions are open-ended (p. 349); and (4) the closed, fixed-response interview, involving “questions and response categories [that] are determined in advance” and fixed responses, with the respondent having to choose from among the responses (p. 349). There are also several types of questions that may be posed during an interview: (1) experience and behavior, designed to ask about a person’s actions that the interviewer would have been able to observe had she been present (pp. 348, 350); (2) opinion and values, which are “aimed at understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes of people” (p. 350); (3) feeling (elicit emotions); (4) knowledge (obtain factual information) (p. 350); (5), sensory, which ask “about what is seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled” (p. 350); and (6) background/demographic, which identify respondent characteristics, like gender, race, education level, occupation, etc. (p. 351).

Use of the Focus Group Method

The focus group method was utilized because this study considered the interaction of the participants, including the researcher, and how we co-constructed meaning. The purposes of this approach are to “generate large quantities of material from relatively large numbers of people in a relatively short time” and to obtain data that are “seldom produced through individual interviewing and observation....[as they involve] synergy and dynamism generated within homogeneous collectives [that] often reveal unarticulated norms and normative assumptions [and which provide access to] collective memories and desires” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903; see also Morgan, 1997, p. 8). As Krueger (1998a) explains:

Focus group interviews produce data...in a focused manner. As a result, participants influence each other, and things learned can shape attitudes and opinions. The discussion is evolutionary, building on previous comments and points of view. (p. 20)

Focus groups can be used to “inhibit the authority of the researchers and to allow participants to ‘take over’ and ‘own’ the interview space” and can lead to the “unearthing of information that is seldom easy to reach in individual memory” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, p. 903). This method first emerged in 1941 when researchers employed the focus group method to study “media effects on attitudes toward America’s involvement in World War II,” largely disappeared during the mid-20th century, and reemerged in the early 1980s as a form of audience analysis research in which the “primary goal was to understand the complexities of how people understood and interpreted media texts” (pp. 898-899). Later, focus groups were most commonly associated with market research, although during the 1990s, they were increasingly employed in academic studies (Morgan, 1997, p. 2). There are three basic applications for focus groups: as a self-contained method, as a supplementary approach used in studies employing another method as the primary means of data collection, and as one of two or more methods used in a multimethod

project in which no single method employed “determines the use of the others” (Morgan, 1997, p. 2).

For this study, focus groups were used as a self-contained method, the primary means of data collection (Morgan, 1997, pp. 2-3). While serving as both the moderator of the discussions and a co-creator of meaning, I both provided the focus of each meeting by asking questions from a topic guide and participated in generating data by keeping the discussions bounded, probing responses, seeking clarification of responses, checking for understanding, and clarifying my prompts when they seemed unclear to the group. In other words, whenever I communicated something to the group either verbally or nonverbally, I participated in the generation of data. When conducting thematic analysis, I identified themes that emerged from the many voices of the groups. And, as I conducted discourse analysis, I based my conclusions on data that were driven by interactivity, by group dynamics, by the ways in which the members positioned themselves in relation to each other as they engaged in the discussions of how they have experienced and view high school reading instruction, and by my participation (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 904).

Interviewing Teens

I incorporated particular approaches to working with adolescents into the focus group process. To begin with, I was mindful of the imbalance of power between the students and myself, as it is cultivated in Western society, whereby children are assigned a lower status than adults. I considered the student participants as their own minority group, as defined by their age, both disadvantaged and disempowered. The fact that they were being researched may have further impacted their status. Unfortunately, no matter how I tried to compensate for this imbalance of power, I recognized that I would be unable to bring all of us to the same level because overcoming the role differences associated with age, cognitive development, physical

maturity, and acquired social responsibility was not conceivable. I also could not change the likelihood that they may have been taught to respect me simply because I am an adult (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; see also Brinkman & Kvale, 2005).

Still, I took steps to facilitate a more comfortable and inviting situation for open communication. I tried to create a natural context for interviewing to lessen the effects of the power imbalance. The use of the focus group approach and ensuring that several students were involved in each group was probably more natural to the students since they were more accustomed to talking among their peers and likely more comfortable doing so than they would have been individually (this is especially the case for African American students). Because there were four students and only two adults (three if the observer is considered) in each group, the power dynamics were more balanced than they would have been in a one-on-one situation. The students may have revealed their culture(s) and their realities more completely as they were in a position to assist each other in sharing this information in a manner that would be more representative linguistically than it may have been if each was on her own. This may have lessened the possibility of imposing my interpretations and language on them during the exchange. Additionally, their accounts were likely more accurate since teens often compel each other to justify their statements (Eder & Fingerson, 2002).

Within the context of the discussions, I endeavored to provide the students (and teachers) with a greater sense of empowerment by listening carefully to what they had to say, emphasizing the centrality and importance of their voices. Through my interactions with the students (and teachers), I may have indirectly led them to a greater understanding of their own experiences by encouraging them to share aspects of their learning (and teaching) experiences that they perhaps have not discussed before, possibly because they assumed or learned that the adults in their lives

(and the teachers' students) would not listen to their concerns. In short, I attempted to convey to the participants that they had an opportunity to express themselves honestly and that they would be heard in a nonjudgmental and accepting manner (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; see also Kvale, 1996; Kyngäs, 2003). Throughout my interactions with the participants, I was conscious of the ethical implications of faking friendship for the purpose of gaining information. I endeavored to treat the participants with sincerity and make my agenda plain to them (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005).

Data Collection

(Refer to Figure 3-1 at the end of this chapter for a summary of the data collection process.) One week before I began conducting the focus groups, I held an introduction meeting for the participants in the school's media center. During this meeting, I introduced myself and my observer (a fellow doctoral student), described the study, distributed information sheets that included a basic description of the study, collected signed consent forms, and provided ground rules for the discussions. The participants introduced themselves, and I provided refreshments during the meeting.

There was a total of eight data collection points (nine were scheduled; one was lost due to a fire drill). I conducted three discussions for two of the three groups, and two discussions for the third group (covering two topics during one of the meetings). The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, resulting in approximately eight hours of data. Each discussion was devoted to one topic. The topics, in the order of coverage, included (1) negotiation of reading conditions (reading activities and assignments), (2) negotiation of teacher assistance, and (3) negotiation of assessment. Within each topic, specific questions served to guide the discussion (see Appendix A for the discussion guides). Participants also provided an opening statement of belief or opinion about the reading instruction they had received (or delivered) at

the beginning of the first discussion and a similar closing statement upon the completion of the final discussion. My prompt in both cases was: “What is your opinion about how reading is taught in high school?” Before the first two discussions, I provided ground rules for participation to the respondents, including a request that they would not interrupt or talk over one another. As a warm-up activity for each meeting, I posed an ice-breaker question, such as “Please tell us who you are, the grade you’re in, and what you like most about high school.” Upon conclusion of each meeting, I provided refreshments to the respondents as a form of compensation.

I also conducted a member-check discussion/debriefing with each group after the individual group sessions were completed. These last sessions (4 in all, approximately 1 hour each) could be considered additional data collection points, for a total of 12 data collection points (one debriefing was conducted with the teachers as a separate group—see below for a discussion about separating the teachers from the students).

To obtain feedback about both how the discussions unfolded and my participation, I enlisted a fellow graduate student as an observer. She took field notes to describe the interactions and capture relevant data that would otherwise not have been evident in the audio recordings (i.e., watching for nonverbal communication from the participants and observing how I facilitated the group interaction). During each session, she kept a running log of notes. After each round of discussions, we debriefed, and I asked her the following questions, as recommended by Krueger (1998b):

1. What are the most important themes or ideas discussed?
2. How did these differ from what we expected?
3. How did these differ from what occurred in earlier focus groups?
4. What points need to be included in the report?

5. What quotes should be remembered and possibly included in the report?
6. Were there any unexpected or anticipated findings?
7. Should we do anything differently for the next focus group?
8. Did I:
 - a. Give clear ground rules?
 - b. Establish and maintain rapport, and create a safe environment for respondents to share their views and experiences?
 - c. Keep the discussion on topic?
 - d. Probe for clarity?
 - e. Avoid leading the respondents?
 - f. Include everyone in the discussion?
 - g. Attend to nonverbal communications?
 - h. Vary voice tone during the process?
 - i. Give clear instructions/directions to the respondents?
 - j. Ask questions that seemed understandable to the participants? (pp. 34, 97)

I also shared my reactions to what I observed and asked for her feedback concerning those reactions. In other words, I would say, “I saw/felt/got the impression that/heard X. Did you see/feel/get the impression of/hear the same thing? If not, what did you experience?” These debriefings were recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts were reviewed as part of the data analysis.

The focus groups were conducted in a conference room located in the school’s media center. The participants sat on either side of an oblong table, while I sat at the head of the table so that I could more directly maintain face-to-face contact with the respondents. The observer sat at the other end of the table. The respondents were seated toward my end of the table, which

allowed for some distance between the observer and the participants. The discussions were recorded (audio only). The recorder and table microphone were positioned on the table, toward the center, where the participants were seated.

Adjusting to Field Conditions

During the first two rounds of focus groups, the students seemed hesitant to talk about their views of and experiences with reading instruction. Two of the participating teachers, Mrs. Otero and Mrs. Thompson, stated that they believed the students were reluctant to express themselves honestly in their presence and that they were holding back. The other teacher, Mrs. Hoskins, stated that she believed the students were having trouble articulating their thoughts, that perhaps the questions should be submitted to them in advance so that they could have time to think of how to answer them. The school's reading coach, Mrs. Madsen, who initially helped coordinate the logistics of the study, also expressed concern that the students had trouble articulating answers to the questions, that perhaps they were not aware, on a metacognitive level, of how they were experiencing reading instruction and could therefore not describe their experiences nor offer opinions about them.

Another possible issue identified via consultation with the supervisory committee was that perhaps the students had little, if any, experience expressing their opinions to adults in a nonadversarial context, that perhaps the novelty of having an adult seeking to listen to them, to seek their honest input, was awkward for them.

To facilitate student input, I decided to conduct the third round of focus groups without the teachers present. When this change did not seem to have an impact on the degree of student commentary, we decided to reevaluate the data collection methodology. After further consultation with my committee, I also decided that I would do the following. I would listen to the recordings and transcribe key comments (relating to essential concepts/issues) made by the

students. I would base my selection of key quotes on whether I wanted to seek to (1) verify the most salient comments, (2) check the less salient comments, or (3) fill in the gaps on responses (to particular questions) that differed among the students (taking a middle approach to the first two strategies). I then used my final meeting with the students to (1) seek their input to the selected quotes, (2) ask them to think of me as a messenger and to state what I should tell the high school reading teachers about what students need from them in order to improve their reading, (3) perform a member check with the students regarding the transcript data, and (4) seek their feedback about the overall focus group experience, asking questions like:

- A. During our earlier meetings, you seemed to be having trouble answering some of the questions. Can you tell me why?
- B. Were you uncomfortable/nervous talking in front of your teachers?
- C. Were you uncomfortable/nervous talking in front of me?
- D. Were any of the questions confusing or too difficult to answer?
- E. When you were answering the questions, did you say everything that came to your mind (regarding how you feel about reading activities/assignments, teacher help, reading assessment)?

Regarding the teachers, I debriefed with them after school to (1) readdress any of the initial questions that were missed, including those concerning reading assessment and whether they would make any changes in a given area (reading assignments/activities, teacher help, reading assessment); (2) perform a member check with them regarding the transcript data; and (3) seek their feedback about the focus group process itself, asking questions similar to those posed to the students:

- A. Were you uncomfortable/nervous talking in front of your students?
- B. Were any of the questions confusing or too difficult to answer?

- C. When you were answering the questions, did you say everything that came to your mind (regarding reading assignments/activities, teacher help, reading assessment)?

Rather than attempting to facilitate a dialogue between the students and their teachers, I focused on understanding the perspectives of each side within the context of Gee's (2005) discourse analysis method.

Data Analysis

The interview transcriptions were first studied inductively, and the responses were coded (open coding) according to emerging themes. Through the application of Attride-Stirling's (2001) Thematic Network Analysis, participant comments that pertained to the research questions were first organized according to basic themes. Next, these themes were grouped into two organizing themes, one for the students, and one for the teachers. Then, a global theme which seemed to capture all of the themes was identified, and all of the themes were arranged in a web-like structure that expresses their relationships (see Figures 4-1 through 4-3). The purpose for this process was to reduce the 12 hours of discussion data (approximately 300 pages of transcription) so that they would be more manageable for discourse analysis. As Richards (2005) explains, "All data require reduction if a story is to be told, an account given of what those data records show....Like the shrunk plastic cladding around an item in a hardware store, your data record should be as large as it needs to be and as small as it can be" (pp. 52, 54).

In order then to explore the realities of reading instruction which the participants had created through the group discussions, Gee's (2005) method of discourse analysis was employed.

According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005):

As "staged conversations," focus groups are especially useful to researchers who want to conduct various kinds of discourse analyses....Focus groups allow researchers to see the complex ways in which people position themselves in relation to each other as they process questions, issues, and topics in focused ways. These dynamics themselves become relevant "units of analysis" for study. (p. 904)

Discourse analysis was applied to those transcript passages that pertained to the research questions and which supported the themes that were initially identified. A general description of discourse analysis and how I applied it to this study follows.

Gee (2005) is concerned with the use of language to construct reality: “We continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies, and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing” (p. 10). He describes “language-in-use” as a “tool” used to “design or build things” and explains that “whenever we speak or write, we always and simultaneously construct or build seven things or seven areas of reality,” which he refers to as “building tasks” (p. 11). These tasks are listed below along with the question a discourse analyst can ask about each one:

1. Significance: How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways or not?
2. Activities: What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as going on)?
3. Identities: What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as operative)?
4. Relationships: What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?
5. Politics: What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be “normal,” “right,” “good,” “correct,” “proper,” “appropriate,” “valuable,” “the way things are,” “the way things ought to be,” “high status or low status,” “like me or not like me,” and so forth)?
6. Connections: How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?
7. Sign systems and knowledge: How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical language vs. everyday language, words vs. images, words vs. equations) or different ways

of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief. (taken directly from pp. 11-13).

In order to understand how these building tasks are performed and “with what social and political consequences,” however, several “tools of inquiry” are used to examine how the participants are employing language (p. 19), including: macro- and micro-lines, macrostructure, situated meanings, discourse models, social languages, discourses, and conversations (in ascending order of focus, from micro to macro level).

Macro- and micro lines

A macro-line is a speech sentence, which is “much more loosely constructed, much less tightly packaged or integrated, than in writing” (p. 132). A micro-line, on the other hand, is an “idea unit,” described as:

Each small spurt out of which speech is composed usually has one salient piece of new information in it that serves as the focus of the intonation contour on the spurt. There is often a slight hesitation, or slight break in tempo after each spurt....The “mind’s eye” also focuses on one fairly small piece of information at a time, encodes it into language, and puts it out of the mouth as a small spurt of speech. Each small chunk in speech represents one such focus of the mind’s eye, and usually contains only one main piece of salient information. (pp. 124-125, 132)

While each unit of text on a numbered line of a transcript passage (e.g., 1a, 1b, and 1c) is a micro-line, the lines (1a, 1b, and 1c) taken together comprise a macro-line. And, the focus of each micro-line is underlined (p. 133).

Macrostructure

A transcript passage may also be organized into major sections, referred to as stanzas, that pertain to subtopics or parts of narrative structure, as in setting, catalyst, crisis, evaluation, resolution, and coda (pp. 129-131).

Situated meanings

Gee explains that “words have different specific meanings in different contexts of use...[their meanings are] ‘grounded in actual practices and experiences’” (p. 53).

Discourse models

Discourse models are “the largely unconscious theories we hold that help us make sense of texts and the world...[they] are simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted, theories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently in our lives.” We develop them through experience, and they are influenced by our social and cultural groups (p. 72).

Social languages

When people use language specifically to express “who they are and what they are doing,” they are employing a social language. Nonlinguistic forms of communication are not considered when a social language is examined (p. 36).

Discourses

Discourses (with a capital “D”) are “ways with words, deeds and interactions, thoughts and feelings, objects and tools, times and places that allow us to enact and recognize different socially situated identities” (i.e., being a student, being a teacher, being an academic researcher) (p. 36).

Conversations

Conversations (with a capital “C”) are:

Debates in society or within specific social groups (over focused issues such as smoking, abortion, or school reform) that large numbers of people recognize, in terms of both what “sides” there are to take in such debates and what sorts of people tend to be on each side. (p. 36)

Again, these “tools of inquiry” are used in the study of how people construct their realities, with each tool laying a foundation for the use of the next, from a micro-focus on the data to a macro-

focus, with Conversations serving as a grand backdrop against which the respondents build their worlds. These tools allow the researcher to arrive eventually at how respondents are using the seven building tasks described above.

For the purposes of my study, I chose to examine the building tasks of politics and sign systems and knowledge. The issue of reading remediation involves the social good of reading literacy, as defined by Florida's standardized assessment program (the FCAT), and the forms of text the students are expected to process proficiently tend to be informational and expository and relate to issues/topics that often seem uninteresting or irrelevant to them. These texts, and standard American English, are being privileged over other texts and forms of English, namely those with which the students may be most comfortable. In arriving at how the respondents were using these building tasks, I used the following tools: macro-and micro-lines, macrostructure, and discourse. These tools seemed adequate for examining how the participants were constructing their realities of reading instruction—how they were using the building tasks.

For each theme, I selected representative passages and presented them according to my interpretation of their macro- and micro-lines and macrostructure. In other words, I reorganized the transcript lines into macro-lines (sentences of speech) and micro-lines (intonation units), and I underlined a word if it was the focus of the micro-line. In most cases, I treated all of the lines of a given passage as a single stanza since they are related to a single "state of affairs" (Gee, 2005, pp. 128-133). I indicated the macrostructure only when the text seemed to suggest subtopics or elements of narrative structure that could be organized into stanzas, and I used ellipses to indicate either inaudible speech or an omission of text from a quote. I then identified and described all of the discourses that seemed to be related to the construction of the text that supported the theme. Lastly, I examined how the participants were using the building tasks of

politics and sign systems and knowledge to construct the realities of reading instruction related to the theme.

Validity in Qualitative Studies

Scheurich (1997) defines validity as “an historically embedded social construction appropriated by a ‘community of scientists’ who decide that certain outstanding examples of research...will guide further work by the community in considering what is and is not trustworthy” (p. 82). He argues, however, that the concept of validity is plagued by a binary view of research as either acceptable or unacceptable and a view of the world in terms of either “same” or “other” (pp. 84-85). He instead calls for a treatment of validity as “the wild uncontrollable play of difference” by adopting an investigative state of “silence...a space of emptiness...[a] clarity of unknowing that appropriates no one or no thing to its sameness” (p. 90).

Lather (2003), on the other hand, presents validity through four frames: (1) ironic, which involves foregrounding “the difficulties involved in representing the social rather than repressing them in pursuit of an unrealized ideal” (p. 677); (2) neo-pragmatic, the focus of which is “to foster differences and let contradictions remain in tension” (p. 679); (3) rhizomatic, which “undermines stability, subverts and unsettles from within...a response to the call of the otherness of any system” (p. 680); and (4) situated, which “posits the fruitfulness of situating scientific epistemology as shaped by a male imaginary,” asking “what the inclusion of a female imaginary would effect where female is other to the male’s Other” (pp. 680-682). She describes her categorization of validity as an overall presentation of “transgressive validity,” the aim of which is to overcome the inadequacy of “traditions of research legitimacy and discourses of validity” (p. 683). In the end, Lather (2001) argues, the legitimacy of a research project lies within a “reflexivity about research practices that takes into account both the crisis of representation and

the limits of reflexivity” (p. 243). She situates validity as a “discursive site that registers a passage to the never arrived place where we are sure of our knowledge and our selves” (p. 247).

Validity for qualitative research can also be pursued more conventionally through transferability, respondent validation, peer debriefing, and trustworthiness, what Lather (2001) would describe as “regulatory discourses of validity” (as opposed to the “constitutive” described above) (p. 244). While generalizability cannot be realized, the findings may be transferable from the specific case being examined to another with similar circumstances. The responsibility of such transfer, however, is left to the reader and facilitated by the researcher providing sufficient detail through thick description of the circumstances of the study (Patton, 2002, pp. 437-440, 581-584; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279; Schwandt, 2001, p. 107).

Respondent validation can be established by the researcher performing member checks with study participants so that they may verify the accuracy of observation and interview data (Creswell, 2003, p. 196; Patton, pp. 560-561; Schwandt, pp. 155-156). For peer debriefing, the researcher can continually consult expert colleagues during the study in order to evaluate the accuracy of observations and conclusions and strive to resolve any discrepancies that may emerge. Such an approach can minimize the effects of researcher bias (Creswell, p. 196; Miles and Huberman, p. 278; Schwandt, p. 188).

Finally, to develop trustworthiness, the researcher can establish her credibility by describing her qualifications to perform the study and provide a subjectivity statement. She should also have an audit trail that documents the activities of the study throughout its duration; clearly link her interpretations and findings to all of the data, reporting methods and results in context; and if applicable, present discrepant information that initially ran counter to emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, pp. 278-279; also see Creswell, p. 196). To strengthen her claims,

she should actively seek anomalous data throughout the study; if she discovers a deviant case, she must explain how she adjusted her claims to accommodate it (Patton, pp. 554-555; Silverman, 2005, pp. 215-219).

Reliability in Qualitative Studies

Some qualitative researchers argue that the work of an investigator cannot really be replicated by another and that therefore the concept of reliability is irrelevant. Many others, however, insist that some degree of reliability can and should be pursued. Some explain that using conventionalized methods in fieldwork, via field note approaches and interview transcription and analysis, and using inter-rater checks on data coding and categorization processes can establish reliability. Others recommend carefully documenting the procedures for generating and interpreting data in order to establish that the evidence to support a claim is dependable (Patton, 2005, pp. 544-546; Schwandt, 2001, pp. 226-227; Silverman, 2005, pp. 220-221).

Establishing Validity in this Study

Transferability

Operating from the perspective that socially constructed knowledge is situated, I have endeavored to provide sufficient detail through thick description of the circumstances of the study in order to allow readers to decide if the findings are applicable to other cases with similar circumstances.

Respondent Validation

I conducted a member check/debriefing with the participants so that they could verify the accuracy of my understanding. Checking for accuracy, however, was also embedded in the focus group approach itself, through the interaction. I emphasized the participants' voices throughout the discussions, and I continually checked for the accuracy of my understanding of

their statements by frequently repeating what they said back to them, often by making statements like, “So, I understand you to be saying that” As St. Pierre (1997) states, “I deliberately sought the Other, many different others, at every stage of the research process, knowing that my very limited, partial, and situated position in the world was both productive and dangerous” (p. 184). This view also applies to my use of peer debriefing.

Peer Debriefing

Throughout the study, a doctoral student peer reviewer, my supervisory committee chair, and I independently assessed the data to improve the reliability of any conclusions reached. We continually evaluated the accuracy of our observations and strove to eliminate any misperceptions, as revealed through this check system. This practice likely helped reduce any potential impact of researcher bias.

Instrumentation

The discussion guides were designed with the assistance of qualitative research expert Dr. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, also of the University of Florida’s College of Education, and my supervisory committee chair, Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein.

Establishing Rapport

I hosted a social gathering of the participants prior to the first discussion in order to introduce myself and the study and to meet the participants. I provided refreshments for this meeting and for each of the focus group sessions. Whenever I met with the participants, I endeavored to maintain a friendly rapport through pre- and post-discussion conversation.

Trustworthiness

In addition to providing circumstantial detail sufficient to allow transferability of the study’s findings and performing a member check, I have established my credibility by describing my qualifications to perform such a study (see below) and by providing a subjectivity statement.

I also recorded an audit trail by documenting the activities of the study throughout its duration. Finally, I have linked my interpretations and findings to the data and reported methods and results in context, a “cardinal principle of qualitative analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 563).

Throughout the study, I actively sought out anomalous data in order to strengthen my claims.

Fallibilism

Although I took the above steps to ensure the integrity of my study, I hold that the view of fallibilism applies to my attempts at establishing validity. I concur with Thayer-Bacon (2003), who states:

I do not think any of us, as knowers, can escape our own social embeddedness completely, and therefore I do not think any one standpoint has the chance of offering us a privileged, clearer, sounder view...I do not think that any of us has a spectator’s view on Reality; we are always embedded within it. We do not have views from nowhere, and we are also never able to see the world from everywhere. We are always situated and limited, our views are from *somewhere*. We are able to gain more critical leverage the more we experience and expose ourselves to others’ standpoints, but we are never able to gain complete understanding. (p. 32)

With this view in mind, I cannot claim that my descriptions, interpretations, and findings accurately represent the experiences of the participants and how they construct their realities.

My account of what occurred during the study is subject to error and revision. What I have established through the steps described above, though, is the plausibility of my findings. Once the reader weighs the situation studied, how I executed my research, my credibility, and the credibility of my evidence, the reader will likely conclude that my findings are indeed plausible (Schwandt, 2001, p. 91). In short, I have sought to establish “validity as quality of craftsmanship” (Kvale, 1996, p. 241).

Researcher Qualifications

Although a novice qualitative researcher, I have completed coursework in qualitative data collection and analysis and program evaluation. I have conducted three qualitative studies, one

of which I presented at the 2005 meeting of the American Educational Research Association and submitted for publication. I have served as a peer reviewer for a qualitative dissertation study, and I have been trained in the use of qualitative data collection and analysis software. I have also co-authored two studies, one of which is in press and another which is under review, and co-authored a published encyclopedia entry. The topics of my previous studies include patient perceptions of hospital safety, teacher nonuse of instructional time, the behavior of elevator occupants, and assistant principal role definition. I also collected interview and observation data for a longitudinal study designed to assess the sustainability and impact of the Florida Reading Initiative on classroom practices at an elementary school in the Northeast Florida region.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. It involved only 12 students and 4 teachers, who were recruited from a single high school, which is situated in a relatively poor, rural community. The students who were included were recruited in part because of their consistent attendance at school, their cooperation and dependability in the classroom, and their social skills. The inclusion of more participants, both students and teachers, including some from an urban high school, and students who had demonstrated resistance to schooling through poor attendance and defiant behavior may have led to somewhat different and/or additional findings. The voices of the students' parents were also not heard, yet their contributions might have also influenced the data. The transferability of the findings may be further compromised by the following issues.

Some participants may not have been forthcoming, and this may have been due in part to limitations of interviewing, including the use of focus groups. According to Patton (2002):

Interview data limitations include possibly distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and simple lack of awareness since interviews can be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interview. Interview data are also subject to recall error, reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer, and self-serving responses. (p. 306)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, after the second discussion, I decided to separate the teachers from the students in an effort to facilitate student input. Some students had seemed hesitant to respond to discussion questions, and two of the teachers questioned whether the mixed-group arrangement made the students feel uncomfortable. While my initial intention was to facilitate mutual understanding between the students and teachers, the power differential may have made some students feel uncomfortable (although during the debriefing sessions, all but one denied this was the case).

Some participants may have misrepresented their beliefs and attitudes. Two of the students and one of the teachers admitted to masking their emotions during certain responses in order to ensure that their comments were acceptable for me to hear (and for the recording).

Student attendance also became an issue. At times, a student was absent from the group or either arrived late or left early to avoid missing a test or classroom presentation. The students often arrived several minutes after the discussions were to begin, and one session had to be cancelled altogether because of a fire drill. For that group, two session topics were covered during one meeting.

Because I had to moderate the discussions so that the topics of study were addressed, I cannot be sure how natural the interactions were (Morgan, 1997, pp. 8-9). Moreover, I was implicated in the construction of meaning as both the moderator and member of the groups. Therefore, the data cannot be separated from my involvement, nor can my analysis of the data be free of my subjectivity.

As a social constructionist, I would argue that all knowledge, including that which is generated by this study, is situated and therefore tentative. My theoretical perspective, however, also serves as a limitation, as confirmed by Patton (2002):

[Social constructionists and] constructivists embrace subjectivity as a pathway deeper into understanding the human dimensions of the world in general as well as whatever specific phenomena they are examining....They're more interested in deeply understanding specific cases within particular context than in hypothesizing about generalizations and causes across time and space. Indeed they are suspicious of causal explanations and empirical generalizations applied to complex human interactions and cultural systems. (p. 546)

A positivist audience would likely question the legitimacy of research driven by such a view.

They would argue that if the findings cannot be generalized, if they have not been generated by the use of "well-defined variables and causal models....[and through the] subjects' random assignment to experimental groups," their value—their usefulness—would be in question

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 8-9).

Table 3-1. Focus group participants by teachers

Hoskins	Otero	Thompson
Chelsea	George	Masey
Robert	Sabrina	Shawna*
William	Lanna	Mark
Patrice	Nicolette	Holley

*Although Shawna was enrolled in Mrs. Hoskins' class, she was assigned to Mrs. Thompson's group because her group needed a fourth student participant.

Table 3-2. Student demographics by gender, race, and grade level

Student	Gender	Race	Grade level
Chelsea	Female	White	11
Robert	Male	African American	11
William	Male	African American	9
Patrice	Female	African American	9
George	Male	White	9
Sabrina	Female	African American	9
Lanna	Female	Latina	10
Nicolette	Female	White	9
Masey	Female	Latina	11
Shawna*	Female	African American	10
Mark	Male	African American	10
Holley	Female	White	10

Table 3-3. Student demographic statistics by gender, race, and grade level

Female	Male	African American	Latino/a	White	9 th grade	10 th grade	11 th grade
8	4	6	2	4	5	4	3

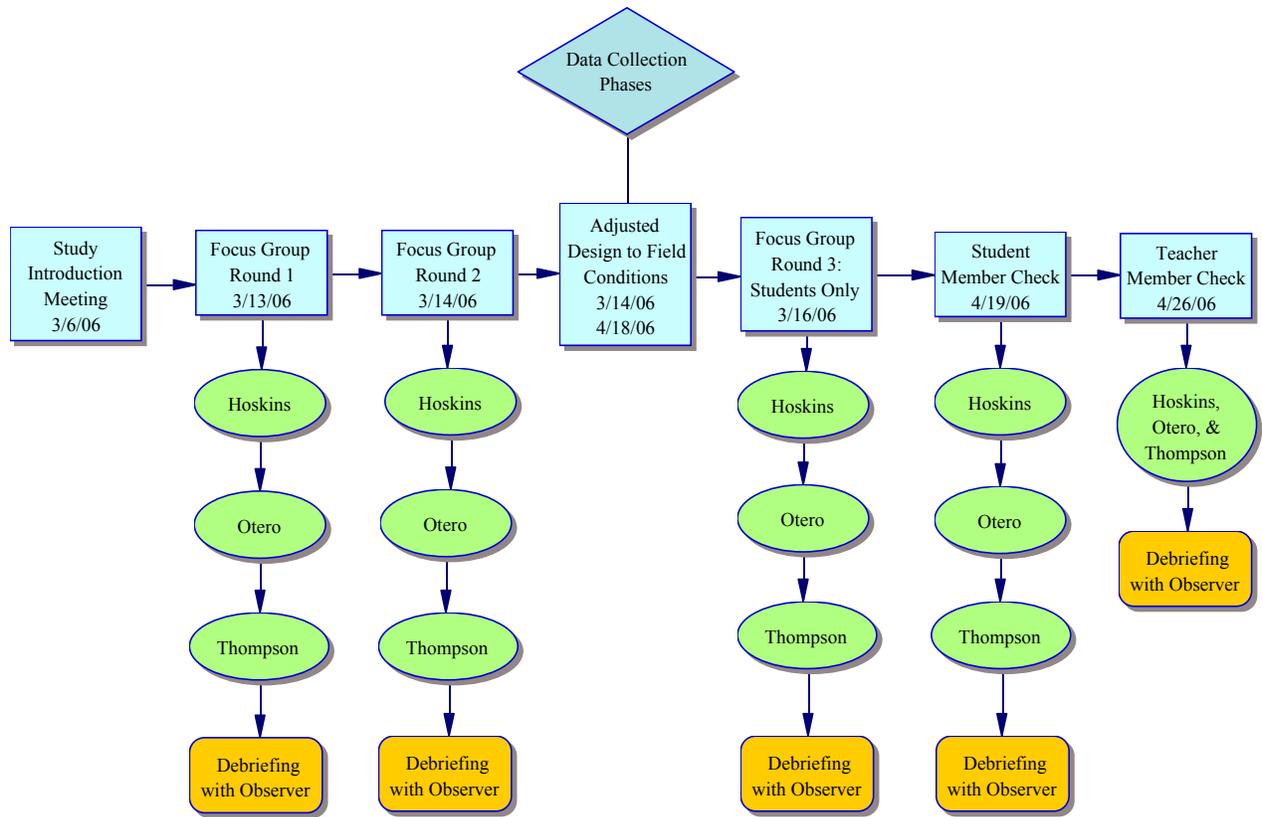


Figure 3-1. Data collection process

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Using Attride-Stirling's (2001) Thematic Network Analysis and components of Gee's (2005) approach to discourse analysis, the focus group data were analyzed. The overarching theme that students and teachers described was barriers to remediation. Students described how they felt excluded from reading instruction due to (1) textual opacity, (2) need for individualized instruction, and (3) oppression. Teachers described impediments to their instruction as (1) nonconducive elements, (2) student motivation, and (3) instruction outside the content areas (see Figure 4-1 at the end of this chapter).

Most of what the teachers and students discussed related to issues that, to them, rendered remediation efforts largely ineffective (see Figures 4-2 and 4-3 at the end of this chapter for the student and teacher themes). Teachers and students agreed that frequent challenges for students included reading text that was difficult to understand in order to determine its meaning and answering comprehension questions that required more than a recall of information. Teachers stressed that students needed individual instruction if they were to overcome the need for remediation.

Within a general discussion of barriers to remediation, students expressed feeling excluded from text that was comprised of unfamiliar vocabulary and uninteresting subject matter. They felt separated from the program because it did not provide enough individualized instruction to permit them to advance their skills. They also expressed feeling oppressed because they were forced to experience remediation through intense and ongoing pressure from the state's assessment program. The state requires that they pass the FCAT in order to be eligible for high school graduation.

Teachers' comments indicated a sense of impediment. They described how they endeavored to attend to individuals' learning needs in an instructional context that was not conducive to these efforts. They described how often they struggled to motivate students to engage with text that initially seemed too difficult or otherwise uninteresting. Also, one of the three teachers repeatedly argued against teaching reading outside the regular content areas and asserted that reading skills could not be developed well in isolation.

In an effort to contextualize socially what the teachers and students have communicated, I applied components of Gee's (2005) method of discourse analysis. What follows are illustrations of this analysis organized according to participant category (teachers/students) and theme. I also considered my involvement in the construction of meaning. First, however, I will describe the discourses that were at play throughout the study.

Students employed their social language within the general discourse of being a student. Gee (2005) defines "discourse" as the language people use to build identities and activities, together with other "stuff" that is not language, like dress, behavior, and other nonverbal forms of communication (pp. 20-21). The particular behavior that the students demonstrated throughout the focus group discussions was waiting to be called upon by me to answer a question. Only rarely, and then for only a few minutes at best, did they actually discuss an issue among themselves. For the most part, they treated me as an authority figure, waiting on me to pose questions and call on them individually to respond, even though I explained that our meetings were intended to be group discussions.

Discussing reading remediation from their perspective, the teachers used the general discourse of being a teacher. Through their presentation of self and commentary, they conveyed their image of professional educators who understand the problems underlying their students'

reading skills. They projected their voices clearly; were dressed professionally; were polite; and demonstrated respect for each other, the students, and the researcher by striving to be on time for the meetings and by trying to avoid interrupting other speakers.

As the researcher, I employed my social language within the general discourse of being an academic researcher. Although I attempted to downplay my discourse by dressing casually in order to make the students feel more comfortable, I was required to wear an identification tag as a school security measure. This tag effectively served as a conspicuous marker of an adult authority figure. I also sat at the head of the oblong table used during the group meetings so that I could be in a better position to see everyone's face and moderate the discussions. Finally, my participation in the discussions involved asking a lot of questions, which also served to place me in the role of an investigator, as someone seeking rather than sharing information.

The Experience of Reading Instruction: Students

Textual Opacity

In all three focus groups, students continually expressed frustration about being required to read text that seemed inaccessible to them because it was loaded with vocabulary that they did not comprehend or because the content was so boring that that they could not maintain their focus. They talked about being so turned off by the assigned texts that they daydreamed during reading and testing. They reported that they were often unaware of what they had read and were unable to demonstrate comprehension by responding to post-reading questions. Some students shared that they had this same experience while taking the FCAT, and as a result, simply filled in the response bubbles to complete the answer sheet. Much of what students discussed revolved around the FCAT. All of the participating students were required to take the remedial reading class (titled Intensive Reading) because they did not pass the reading section of the FCAT. Therefore, their focus on test-related issues is not surprising.

The discussion excerpts in this chapter tend to involve the same students. All of the student-generated issues that will be discussed were common across all of the focus groups. However, only a few of the students tended to talk at length about their experiences, thereby providing rich illustrations of what happened during their reading instruction, from their perspective.

In the following discussion excerpt, Robert, Chelsea, Patrice, and William responded to the question “If you were in charge of how students are tested on their reading ability in high school, what changes would you make?” A word is underlined if it is the focus of the micro-line. All of the lines of this passage comprise a single stanza since they are related to a single “state of affairs” (Gee, 2005, pp. 128-133).

Excerpt 1:

1. Robert: I would get rid of the FCAT.
2. Question: And, your main reason for that again is?
3. Robert: Basically, the reading.
4. Question: The reading?
5. Robert: Yeah, I failed it twice.
6. Chelsea: Me, too (she and Robert laugh).
- 7a. Question: If you were to try to come up with a reason why you think you failed the test,
- 7b. what would it be?
8. Robert: Probably the questions.
- 9a. Question: OK.
- 9b. What about the reading passages?
- 10a. Robert: Yeah, those too.
- 10b. Kind of like, when they're real boring, I kind of look away, look around and stuff, and get off topic (laughs).
11. Chelsea: Yeah, you're always thinking about what you're going to do later (Robert: Yeah), and what you're going to do tonight, and how, it's just (trails off).
12. Robert: Yeah, “I can't wait till I get out of here.”
- 13a. Chelsea: I know.
- 13b. [I'm thinking] “How much longer we got left, again?”
14. Patrice: And, we spend so much time on it, too.
15. Robert: Yeah, sitting in a room, filled with complete silence.

- 16a. Chelsea: I liked it because when you got done, you could put your head down and go to sleep
- 16b. ...and you really didn't even pay attention to the passages.
- 17a. Robert: And, when you get to the questions, you're, like, guessing and don't want to look back [to the text] for the answer
- 17b. [it's] too far to go back, and you've got to read all over again [to determine the answers].
18. Question: So, in the end, it really doesn't matter what the questions are because the passage is what really turns you off in the first place?
19. Robert: Yeah.
20. Chelsea: Right.
21. William: I'm the same with them. (H316T23-C, 324-374)

Despite having failed the reading section of the FCAT at least two times, Robert and Chelsea both laughed about their past performance and discussed how they consciously avoided the test by disengaging from the reading activities. They talked about how their minds wandered and how they passed the testing time idly by waiting for it to end. On the surface, it seems like they were resigned to failing the test, despite how doing so jeopardizes their graduation.

Although the discussion began with specifics about who failed the test and how many times, the students then described their rejection of text that seems inaccessible to them—how it is boring; how they do not attend to it; how long they have to endure it; and how they think about what they are going to do after the test, the silence of the room, going to sleep, and getting out. Their escape from the test-taking situation has been achieved by daydreaming and sleeping. They seemed to be describing an oppressive situation, one that compels them to search for a way out.

As the discussion moderator, I contributed to the shaping of this exchange by asking them what changes they would make to how they are tested. Perhaps I implied to them that change was necessary, that something was wrong and needed to be addressed. When I asked them about whether the test questions “matter,” I invited them to question the legitimacy of the test by

perhaps inferring that if the passages are inaccessible, the questions are irrelevant, and therefore the test itself is irrelevant.

In the following exchange, Sabrina discussed her experience with a reading practice computer program called *FCAT Explorer*. Through this program, she practiced reading test-like passages and responding to the questions that follow. Students may work at grade level or choose to work at a lower level. The students were asked to describe the reading activities or assignments that they enjoyed the most. Sabrina stated that she liked working on the in-class computer, especially playing the available word games. Mrs. Otero, her teacher, then asked her to talk about what she thought of *FCAT Explorer*.

Excerpt 2.

- 1a. Sabrina: The 10th grade was a little too hard
1b. so I went to the 4th grade (laughs).
2a. Question: So, the FCAT Explorer program that helps you prepare for the
FCAT for the 10th grade you found too hard
2b. so you went to the 4th grade.
3a. Sabrina: It was complicated
3b. because some of the words were too big
3c. and some of them I hadn't learned yet.
3d. And, so, I just take it back up to the 4th grade, to the level they had
and try those
3e. see could I learn more words
3f. and that'd probably help by doing that.
4. Question: So, you were using the 4th grade level to learn vocabulary?
5a. Sabrina: I started on the 10th and kind of got half-way through,
5b. but I didn't kind of get the rest of it
5c. so, I was getting most of them wrong
5d. so just went up to the 4th.
6. Question: When you were moving down from 10th, was your next choice the
4th grade?
7. Otero: Actually, there's 8th grade.
8. Sabrina: I went to the smallest one.
9. Question: And, you did that because you were more comfortable with it?
10. Sabrina: Yes.
11. Question: Did you look at the 8th grade before you went to the 4th grade?
12. Sabrina: Mmm hmm [yes], and it looked like the 10th. (O313T1-C, 226-
261)

Sabrina explained that she was unable to comprehend text for her grade level presented through *FCAT Explorer*. She did not feel capable of understanding until she moved to a lower grade level in the program. She shared that her struggle was that the vocabulary was “too hard,” “complicated,” “hadn’t learned yet,” and “wrong.” She reduced her challenge to the “smallest one” available in the program, explaining that the program’s next level below 10th—8th—“looked just like the 10th.”

I contributed to this exchange by focusing Sabrina’s attention on her decision to move from the 10th grade level of *FCAT Explorer* to the 4th grade, perhaps implying that this was an important issue. I tried to understand what led her to make what seemed to be a dramatic reduction in reading level and asked her if she had looked at the 8th grade material before going to the 4th. Although she introduced the issue of vocabulary as her reason for the change, I was trying to reassure myself that there was a learning purpose behind her decision, that she was using the 4th grade material to “learn vocabulary,” because she was preparing to move up in difficulty eventually.

Sabrina also talked about what has happened when she is required to read text that she finds difficult, an experience similar to what Robert and Chelsea described in Excerpt 1. Responding to the question of what points made during the discussion do the participants believe have been the most important, Mrs. Otero talked about the students understanding what they have read, and Sabrina responded.

Excerpt 3.

- | | | |
|-----|--------|--|
| 1a. | Otero: | And, I want my students to have <u>more understanding</u> |
| 1b. | | and she [Sabrina] <u>brought that up</u> . |
| 2a. | | Just because they’re reading a book, they <u>may not necessarily understand it</u> |
| 2b. | | and, I know <u>vocabulary</u> is one way to increase that knowledge.... |

3. Sabrina: Like the book we're reading right now, I don't know nothing about it.
- 4a. I read it, and then the next time, like when we read it we have to take questions on it, I don't comprehend on it
- 4b. because I done forgot it all
- 4c. so it's gone.
- 5a. When I'm reading, I comprehend what I'm reading at the time
- 5b. and then my mind goes to something else
- 5c. and it's gone.
6. Question: When your mind goes to something else, are you talking about maybe daydreaming, thinking of something that has nothing to do with the story?
7. Sabrina: Exactly (laughs).
8. Question: So, when you're then asked questions that call on you to show how you understand the story, you have trouble with those because you were thinking about other things?
9. Sabrina: Yes.
10. Otero: And, you need to know that we're not reading but like 7 pages.
- 11a. Question: Sabrina, let's say that you've just finished your seventh page.
- 11b. You're reading seven pages, you've finished your seventh page.
- 11c. How long does it take you to forget what you've just read?
- 12a. Sabrina: I'd probably be daydreaming before it's time to get through...
- 12b. My nerves be tense
- 12c. and I start . . . looking around.
- 13a. Then, I go back to the book
- 13b. and I've lost my place
- 13c. so I start all over and try again. (O313T1-C, 369-404)

When Sabrina reads text that she does not understand, her “nerves” become “tense,” her “mind goes blank,” she starts daydreaming and “looking around,” she forgets what she has read so far, loses her place in the text, and has to reread it. And, all this happens before she can finish seven pages of a grade-level novel in class. Her words of focus related to this experience, although I used the word “daydreaming” to restate her phrase “goes to something else.” Her comments were similar to Robert’s and Chelsea’s. They described their own tendency to look around and daydream when reading challenging text and then having to reread the passage(s).

During a discussion of reading assessment, Sabrina talked about shutting down completely during her testing, believing that any effort to succeed with 10th-grade level reading is useless.

Excerpt 4.

1. Question: So if you're doing the 10th grade level in FCAT Explorer and you read the passage a little bit and you see that you don't like it ...
2. Sabrina: I ain't read it.
3. Question: You don't even start to read it?
4. Sabrina: No, I ain't read it!
5. Question: Not even the first few sentences?
6. Sabrina: Uh uh! ...
7. You know when you have to write "Think and Explain" [the Read, Think and Explain section of the FCAT, where students write extended responses to reading comprehension questions]?
8. I don't never do that...
9. My process writing [is] a [at a level] 1
10. I don't do it! ...
11. Question: And, why is that?
- 12a. Sabrina: I don't like to write
- 12b. and I better stay focused on what I be reading.
- 13a. Question. So reading is already such a challenge for you
- 13b. you're already having enough trouble with 10th grade reading that the writing is just too much to deal with?
- 14a. Sabrina: Right.
- 14b. The reading and writing
- 14c. because I don't comprehend on what I was reading
- 14d. and so [when] it's time to "Think and Explain," I don't do it.
(O419SD-E, 990-1079)

Sabrina clearly rejects both the reading and writing activities that she is expected to do during testing practice and on the actual FCAT. Many of her words of focus conveyed negation, like "don't like," "ain't read it," "never do," "don't do," and "don't comprehend" as she talked about how she refuses to engage in such activities. And, I contributed to maintaining this theme of rejection by attempting to confirm my understanding of her statements by using the same language.

First, we established that Sabrina skips the 10th grade reading passages in *FCAT Explorer* when she is required to work at that level. She then relies on the laws of probability to answer the questions correctly by taking advantage of the repeated opportunities that the program offers to guess at them. Next, we found that she also refuses to answer the "Read, Think, and Explain"

sections that follow reading passages in the FCAT because they require that she write out extended responses rather than select a response in a multiple choice format. Although she said that she has outright refused to read 10th-grade level test material, she also stated that she has avoided the extended response questions on the test because she felt compelled to concentrate on reading the passages. Still, she concluded by saying that since she does not comprehend what she reads, she does not complete the written response sections on the test. I seem to validate her feeling overwhelmed when in lines 13a and 13b I used phrases “enough trouble,” “such a challenge,” and “too much to deal with” to explain her refusal. Sabrina’s rejection of these activities implies that she has felt excluded from an assessment context that involves reading material that she does not understand. She has made up her mind that 10th grade material is beyond her grasp and will not engage with it.

Sabrina’s perspective has been emphasized because she elaborated on issues that other participants said substantially less about. Her comments about having difficulty attending to 10th-grade level text, though, were consistent with the experiences described by the other students, including Robert and Chelsea.

To investigate what may be driving the students’ views, the discourses and building tasks were examined. These elements of Gee’s (2005) approach to this method of analysis derive from the macro-/micro-line structure examined above. The discourses at play in the theme textual opacity are discussed below. The building tasks are discussed at the end of the section on student themes and discourses.

Coping through retreat

Rather than confront 10th-grade-level text when using the FCAT practice software, Sabrina has retreated to a lower level text, falling all the way back to 4th-grade-level activities—the “smallest one” (see Excerpt 2). She complained that the 10th grade vocabulary is “too hard,”

“complicated,” that the words are “too big,” and that she “hadn’t learned [some of the words] yet.” Although she initially attempted the 10th grade level of the program, she found that she was answering many of the questions that follow the passages incorrectly and now continues to avoid this level. While an 8th grade level is available, she stated that it “looked like the 10th.” When Sabrina first admitted to doing 4th grade work in the program, she laughed, perhaps because she was aware that she has retreated a long way from the text that she is expected to master at her grade level. Regardless of what is expected of her, Sabrina chooses to cling to the comfort of familiarity.

Coping through distraction

Most of the students talked about escaping from the difficulties of grade-level reading and processing informational text by allowing their minds to wander, even while testing. Robert admitted that when bored with passages, he would “kind of look away, look around and stuff, and get off topic” (see Excerpt 1). Similarly, Chelsea talked about how she would think of what she was going to be doing later. Both Robert and Chelsea discussed thinking about the time, being distracted by the silence in the room, wanting to put their heads down, not paying attention to the test passages, and then guessing at the answers to the questions because they did not know what they had read. Although they have both failed the FCAT twice, they seemed resigned to avoiding the test through mental escapism.

Sabrina also discussed how when faced with questions on a passage she does not comprehend, she cannot respond correctly because the text is “gone” from her mind—she has “done forgot it all” (see Excerpt 3). She stated that her mind “goes to something else” as she tries to read and that her “nerves be tense.” Then, she starts “looking around,” eventually losing her place in the text and having to “start all over and try again.” Like Robert and Chelsea, when

asked to process grade-level text, Sabrina cannot maintain her focus on the passages and does not recall what she has read. She chooses to daydream instead of wading through the unfamiliar.

Coping through rejection

The students also expressed outright rejection of 10th grade text, especially informational text, and the FCAT itself. Robert wanted to “get rid of the FCAT” (see Excerpt 1). Robert’s group agreed that the specific test questions did not matter to them because they were “turned off” by the passages themselves—their rejection of the text left the questions that followed unanswerable. By retreating to 4th-grade-level text, Sabrina has rejected 10th grade text as well (see Excerpt 2). Now, she will not even look at the 10th grade sections of FCAT Explorer and refuses to attempt the extended response questions that follow the test passages (see Excerpt 4). She explained that she has so much trouble with the passages that she will not try to write out responses to the “Read, Think and Explain” questions. She knew her writing was at a “level 1” (it must be at a level 3 in order for her to qualify for graduation from high school) and therefore did not feel capable of tackling the questions that require her to write. Her lack of confidence with processing 10th grade text through reading and writing has led her to cope with the FCAT by rejecting its requirements.

Need for Individualized Instruction

When discussing their experiences with how their teachers have helped them in class, students repeatedly mentioned how one-on-one assistance or small group activities with the teacher were the most beneficial. They frequently stated that they wanted much more individualized instruction. The following passages illustrate comments made by most of the students, although only a few speakers are represented in this discussion.

When her group was asked to describe a situation in which one of their high school teachers helped them with their reading, Chelsea responded as follows:

Excerpt 5.

- 1a. I think for me the one that helps me best is Mrs. Hoskins
- 1b. because I just took the FCAT for the third time
- 1c. and it was reading.
2. Mrs. Hoskins...., like their blue FCAT books, we were doing those in class earlier, in the beginning of the year.
- 3a. And, she encourages
- 3b. and, like, “Oh, you can pass—just do this and this.”
4. Well, after class, I asked, I said, “Mrs. Hoskins, what can help me to focus better?”
- 5a. Well, then we did this little sheet of paper that tells us our weaknesses and strengths
- 5b. and, like, we had it highlighted.
- 6a. Well, my weaknesses were...compare and contrast
- 6b. so I went back
- 6c. and she asked me if there was any way.
7. And, she’d give me bonus points on that if I’d go back and do the whole chapter on the compare and contrast.
- 8a. Well, I did it
- 8b. and when I did it for her, I passed it.
9. And, I’m like, “Well, why can’t I get this on the FCAT?”
10. And, I think she’s the one that helps me the most.
- 11a. And, I think she’s—out of my whole, my three years that I’ve been here
- 11b. I think she’s really the one that’s helped me the most.
- 12a. [She] encourages
- 12b. and sticks to your side
- 12c. and just, that kind of teacher that’s friendly
- 12d. and also a teacher
- 12e. and wants to be there
- 12f. and just helps. (H316T23-C, 62-80)

Chelsea, now a junior, has taken the reading section of the FCAT for the third time. She explained, though, that this is the first time she received individual help from a teacher in identifying her specific reading weakness—“compare and contrast.” The teacher provided her with an opportunity to practice the skill and offered her “bonus points” for following through with the practice. And, when she was assessed on this skill again, apparently through a non-FCAT measure, she demonstrated competency. Although she still must succeed with this skill on the FCAT, she wondered why she has not been able to do so previously. Her words of focus

were related to teacher intervention, teacher encouragement, the use of incentive, and teacher characteristics that have made a difference to Chelsea: “encourages,” “sticks to your side,” “friendly,” “also a teacher,” “wants to be there,” and “just helps.” Chelsea explained that by demonstrating care and providing individual attention, Mrs. Hoskins has “helped me the most,” a statement she made in various forms repeatedly.

My only prompt for Chelsea was asking her to describe how one of her high school teachers has helped her with her reading. This prompt assumed, however, that she had indeed been helped in some way. She freely described the experience, without any intermittent prompting from me, and praised Mrs. Hoskins and her efforts, although Hoskins was not present during this meeting.

Shawna also described Mrs. Hoskins as a teacher who has provided the individual help she believes is essential to her reading development.

Excerpt 6.

- 1a. You just have to find the right teacher
- 1b. that’s going to teach it right
- 1c. because some teachers, they don’t
- 1d. you don’t learn it like this.
- 1e. but some, they teach you how you know it
- 2a. ...you have to find the right teacher...like, my teacher this year, Mrs. Hoskins
- 2b. like, if you have a problem, she breaks it down to the basics
- 2c. where it needs to be at.
3. And, if you’re having a problem with something, she’s always there.
4. You can always talk to her and stuff. (T313T1-C, 69-78)

For Shawna, the “right teacher,” one who will “teach it right,” is someone who will “teach you how you know it,” according to how a student best learns (see line 1d). By tailoring instruction to the individual student’s needs, this teacher makes the instruction/content manageable for the student and is always approachable. While Shawna contended that some teachers do not individualize their instruction, she believed that Mrs. Hoskins had done so.

Shawna was responding to the discussion questions, “What is your opinion about how reading is taught in high school? How do you feel about it?” I intended these questions to be neutral, inviting the students to respond however they wished. Shawna answered them without any intermittent prompting from me. She, however, spoke after Masey had talked about how she had asked her guidance counselor to move her to Mrs. Thompson’s class because she believed her reading remediation needs were not being met.

Within the same discussion, Mark mentioned how he also had a reading teacher who did not meet his needs and how Mrs. Thompson now provides the individual attention he wants, including after-school tutoring.

Excerpt 7.

- 1a. Mrs. Thompson, she teaches everything in steps and stuff
- 1b. like I would like it.
2. Because, like, last year, the teacher I had would just work out of a workbook every day.
3. She wouldn’t even explain something.
- 4a. Mrs. Thompson, she would take time out for her students
- 4b. and sometimes...like when FCAT was getting ready to come out, and I’d stay after school
- 4c. and she’d let me read articles and find out information and work on my weaknesses
- 4d. what I needed to work on for the FCAT. (T313T1-C, 189-196)

Like Shawna, what is important to Mark is the individual access he has to his teacher, even if the bulk of that access is available after school. Like Mrs. Hoskins, Mrs. Thomas makes the instruction/content manageable, teaching “everything in steps,” and does not leave Mark to acquire skills solely through a workbook approach to remediation. She tailors her instruction to Mark’s specific needs, working on his “weaknesses.”

Mark was responding to the discussion question, “If you were in charge of reading activities and assignments in the high school, what changes would you make?” While he did not

recommend any specific changes, he implied that reading remediation should be driven by the students' individual needs. His words of focus related to the theme of need for individualized instruction.

When asked to state their opinion about how reading is taught in the high school, Holley, Mark, and Shawna also emphasized the importance of individual instruction and how it seems to be lacking.

Excerpt 8.

1. Holley: Some teachers need to learn to teach a little bit better.
2. Question: And, what do you mean by that?
- 3a. Holley: Like, some teachers, they'll write on the board and tell you what to do
- 3b. and, like, if a student don't comprehend it
- 3c. and you go to ask
- 3d. sometimes, they won't tell you what to do.
4. They'll be like, "It's on the board—read it."
- 5a. Mark: I think the ones [teachers] that don't know how to really teach reading
- 5b. should go to, like, a teaching convention or something, a reading convention
- 5c. so they can know how to teach the students on their level.
- 6a. Shawna: You got some teachers that can teach
- 6b. and you have some teachers that don't.
- 7a. They expect for you to learn it on your own
- 7b. and you can't
- 7c. you can't do that like that. (T316T3-C, 321-338)

Here, the students described an experience that was mentioned repeatedly during the discussions: students believing that they have been left to struggle with their remediation largely on their own. They talked about teachers who seem either unable or unwilling to help them individually, referring them to "the board" instead. Mark even mentioned the need for teacher training, and Shawna argued that, at least for her, remediation will not work if it is left to the student: "you can't do that like that."

Several of the participants viewed having students of markedly different reading achievement levels in the same class as a barrier to individual instruction, that the needs of those who are struggling are not being met in such situations. When Masey stated that the students should be grouped according to their reading level, Lanna, raising her voice, spoke emphatically as Shawna agreed with Masey.

Excerpt 9.

- 1a. Lanna: And I agree
2. Shawna: I agree.
- 1b. Lanna: because if there's a person like she was saying that's less advanced than one person
- 1c. as the teacher's working to bring up the low person's ability and what they don't know
- 1d. you're bringing down the other
- 1e. because meanwhile we know we're sitting in this class where the people that don't know
- 1f. and we just got to sit there listening to what we already know as they learn.
- 2a. Even though I think it's good to help your peers and help them improve
- 2b. I think we should be with our level in a class where the teacher's teaching me something that she knows as well.
3. We're learning something together.
- 4a. It's not like I'm just learning it
- 4b. and she doesn't know it.
5. I think we should be in a class where everybody has the same
6. Masey: Same level.
7. Lanna: Yes. (T419SD-E, 951-1000)

Lanna shifted the focus from the students who are struggling to those who are more advanced, arguing that their needs are also not being met—they are having “to sit there” and listen to what they “already know.” For these students, the classroom teacher is largely unable to provide the need-based instruction they seek because she cannot focus on one ability level without ignoring another. Although Patrice’s suggestion of using peer support might improve the situation, Lanna

still believed the students should be taught according to their reading level. The discourses at play in the theme need for individualized instruction are discussed below.

Success through personal coaching

Chelsea described her experience with finding success through the personal coaching she received from Hoskins (see Excerpt 5). She explained that Hoskins investigated the weakness Chelsea needed to address, encouraged her, and provided the incentive of bonus points. Hoskins provided a measurement for the use of “compare and contrast” and assessed her performance in this area, confirming that Chelsea had indeed progressed. Chelsea implied that in nearly three years of attending Rural High School, this is the first teacher-student relationship that has helped her to improve a skill she needs to pass the FCAT, and the difference for her has been Hoskins’ coaching approach. Shawna has also benefited from Hoskins’ personal attention, explaining that “she’s always there...you can always talk to her and stuff” and that the “right teacher” will “teach you how you know it” through individualization (see Excerpt 6). Mark stated how he has learned more effectively when Thompson “would take time out” for him, working with him after school (see Excerpt 7). Holley, Mark, and Shawna, on the other hand, discussed the problems associated with a lack of coaching (see Excerpt 8). They complained about having teachers who “don’t know how to really teach reading,” who leave the students to struggle through the lessons on their own and simply refer them to the instructions when they ask for help. Here is the antithesis of a coach, one who demands the attainment of a goal without providing necessary support.

Success through addressing deficits

The students often discussed how they needed help with their individual reading weaknesses, arguing that such help is what leads them to success. As mentioned above, Chelsea improved her text processing abilities when Hoskins addressed her need for help with comparing

and contrasting (see Excerpt 5). Mark talked about how Thompson’s after-school tutoring made a difference for him because she would “work on my weaknesses—what I needed to work on for the FCAT” (see Excerpt 7). The participants described specific struggles with reading, and they wanted help that would target the particular deficits that lead to those struggles.

Success through breaking it down

Students also described how they needed to have concepts and processes broken down for them so that their learning could be more manageable. Shawna (see Excerpt 6) stated that “if you have a problem,” Hoskins “breaks it down to the basics, where it needs to be at,” while Mark (Excerpt 7) talked about how Thompson “teaches everything in steps...like I would like it.” To learn how to identify the main idea of a passage, for example, the students asked that this skill be treated as a step-by-step process. They wanted to learn an approach that will guide them to the main idea, one that they can transfer from one text to another. For many students, “breaking it down” involves learning unfamiliar words they encounter in a passage before they can apply higher-order thinking.

Success through meeting us at our level

Addressing another common concern, Lanna argued that students should be taught according to their ability levels (see Excerpt 9), complaining that the needs of more advanced students are ignored in the process of focusing on those who need more remedial instruction. She stated that the students should be “in a class where everybody has the same level,” and Masey echoed this point. Mark contended that teachers should receive training in individualized instruction (see Excerpt 8), so that they “can know how to teach the students on their level.” Obviously, not all students are at the same place developmentally, especially with regard to reading skills. Attempting to address the needs of an ability-varied group with a whole-class lesson without providing follow-up, personal support seems futile, at least for those who are left

behind by the lesson. The students were keenly aware of this. They knew when their needs were being ignored, and they resisted instruction that allowed this to occur. More importantly, they were not gaining from such instruction.

In sum, another theme emerging from the student data is need for individualized instruction. Individual students' reading deficits are unique, yet they often receive instruction intended to apply to general reading deficiencies. At times, the students are left to manage their own remediation through the completion of seatwork, apparently with little, if any, teacher guidance. They talked of being referred to the board or to a workbook when seeking help. When they have received individual help, they have benefited from it, and they wanted more. They did not see value in remediation without intervention that is aimed at their specific needs.

Oppression

Merriam-Webster Online (www.webster.com) defines "oppress" as "to burden spiritually or mentally: weigh heavily upon." When the students discussed the stress they felt with regard to their remediation, in effect, they were describing a state of oppression. In addition to talking about how the texts they were required to read seemed inaccessible, and how they wanted more individual instruction, students often discussed feeling significant pressure to succeed with their reading development. This pressure has been generated by the graduation requirement to pass the FCAT, a test all of the participants have already failed at least once. Several students talked about feeling so nervous that they were unable to perform on the test. Others complained about the school's emphasis on FCAT preparation.

Some felt so much anxiety that they deliberately sabotaged their performance by not reading the text passages and then arbitrarily filling in test answer sheet bubbles and skipping the extended response sections. Sabrina, George, and Nicolette discussed how they have responded to the stress of taking the test.

Excerpt 10.

Sabrina has felt nervous during the test

- 1a. Sabrina: The pressure is what is making you like you want to do it right....
- 1b. don't mess up
- 1c. make sure you get this right
- 1d. make sure you read right
- 1e. make sure you know the words and understand it right
- 1f. and makes you write enough for the paragraph...“Think and Explain”
- 1g. make sure you circle, bubble in, the right question
- 1h. because most kids get off focus because they work too hard studying a lot in class
- 1i. and then they come down to do it
- 1j. and then they're nervous....
- 2a. I get nervous
- 2b. I know that much.
- 3a. Because you're reading something
- 3b. and you forget a word
- 3c. or say it wrong
- 3d. and you're not comprehending what you're reading.

George has responded to the pressure through avoidance

- 4. Question: George, you were nodding your head?
- 5. George: Yeah, man, you can walk into a room and you can just feel the nervousness when you walk in there.
- 6a. And I get real nervous...
- 6b. and . . . I'll sit there and read the story
- 6c. and I'll read it again
- 6d. and I'll forget the whole thing
- 6e. and then I'll just start bubbling answers.
- 7. Question: Just bubbling, just to get them filled in?
- 8a. George: Because it makes me nervous
- 8b. and I forget all the answers, so.

Sabrina has responded to the pressure through avoidance

- 9. Question: Sabrina, you had your hand go up.
- 10. Sabrina: (raising her voice) I did [just bubble in answers without reading the passages]—sure enough did (emphatic), in the middle part and at the end.
- 11. Question: On the reading?
- 12. Sabrina: (still in a raised voice) Mmm hmm (emphatic).

13. I sure enough did (emphatic).
14. Question: So, you got nervous like George was saying and just started bubbling in answers (Sabrina: I got) just to get them bubbled in?
- 15a. Sabrina: I was nervous when I first started
- 15b. but I tried to stay focused off the nerves
- 15c. and it just came back.
- 15d. And, I got bad focus
- 15e. and I lost again.
16. Question: Every time you got nervous...did you just start filling in bubbles?
17. Sabrina: I would read it....
- 18a. But if I don't understand
- 18b. I forget about it
- 18c. and just starting bubbling in answers (emphatic)....
19. I had fun (emphatic).
20. I made a tree (emphatic).
21. Question: So you actually turned filling in the bubbles into something fun to do?
22. Sabrina: Yeah!
23. I make the little lines go from side to side to side, side to side to side, side to side to side (she mimed the process on the surface of the table)....
- 24a. Question: So, when you lose your focus
- 24b. that's when you find yourself doing stuff like that?
25. Sabrina: Yeah.
26. It be fun, too. (emphatic)
27. But, you probably get some of them wrong.

Nicolette has been unable to focus on the test

- 28a. Nicolette: I think if you're really nervous
- 28b. you can't concentrate on what you're reading
- 28c. because all you're thinking about in your head
- 28d. is like "Oh my gosh am I going to do this right?"
- 28e. or "Am I reading this wrong?"
- 28f. and you can't focus.

Students believed the FCAT is overemphasized in school

29. Question: Well, Masey says this about the FCAT:
- Every day, they're talking about the FCAT, so maybe they need to forget about it. Just focus on how we need to improve our reading and that's it. (T314T2-C, 259-261)
- 30a. Sabrina: They're right

- 30b. because at the beginning of the year that's what all your focus is about is the FCAT
- 30c. and FCAT ain't till close to the end of the school year
- 30d. and you're just thinking about FCAT—FCAT, FCAT.
- 30e. And how come after we're through with FCAT why we still got to do work like FCAT?
- 31a. We would have been still doing it if the computer, if it hadn't been messed up on the computer, FCAT Explorer.
- 31b. I'm happy it messed up. (O419SD-E, 662-800)

This discussion began with Sabrina describing how the testing performance pressure she felt and her concomitant nervousness caused her to focus on getting everything “right” as she faced the exam. She did not want to “mess up” and was concerned with reading the text “right” and understanding it “right,” aware that a particular interpretation would lead to the “right” answer. When she shifted to talking about getting “off focus” and feeling nervous from the pressure to perform correctly, she discussed forgetting, making mistakes, and “not comprehending.” She then confirmed that her feelings of nervousness escalated.

At this point, George mentioned actually experiencing nervousness as if it were a physical characteristic of the testing environment. He then admitted to “bubbling answers” arbitrarily after rereading a given passage and forgetting “the whole thing.” When asked if he did this during the most recent administration of the FCAT, however, he stated that he did not, claiming that he “knew most of the questions.” George’s denial, though, seemed to compel Sabrina to declare her avoidance of the test. In an elevated voice and defiant tone, she stated that she “sure enough did” arbitrarily answer the test questions in response to feeling nervous, not understanding the reading passages, and losing “focus.” She described deliberately making patterns with the answer sheet bubbles “from side to side” and said more than once that doing so was “fun” (lines 19 and 26). She laughed when mentioning how one might “probably get some of them wrong.” Her laughter led the rest of the students and I to laugh, although I was

astonished at how comfortable she seemed to be and how she seemed to have accepted her strategy as necessary to endure the experience.

Nicolette then also described feeling “really nervous” and being unable to concentrate. She mentioned thinking only about “doing this right” and, like Sabrina, worrying about reading the text correctly and trying to interpret it appropriately. These concerns prevented her from being able to “focus.”

Finally, perhaps providing a basis for the degree of pressure the students have felt, Sabrina complained of the school’s emphasis on FCAT performance throughout the school year. She claimed that even after the test has been administered, the remediation students are still doing FCAT practice work, and she told of feeling “happy” that the *FCAT Explorer* program is “messed up” in her classroom and cannot be used. She responded to Masey’s quoted statement that she believed that the school should focus on reading improvement without talking so much about the FCAT specifically. From the students’ perspective, the school’s emphasis on FCAT performance interferes with their ability to focus on the test itself because they become consumed with “right” and “wrong” reading and responding. This, combined with the texts that seem inaccessible to them and their belief that they have not received adequate instruction, creates an intimidating testing situation, one that seems so daunting that they would rather avoid the test altogether.

The students understood how high the stakes are for passing the FCAT. Their graduation is in jeopardy, they may have to retake the Intensive Reading class the following year, and in doing so they may forego taking an elective that interests them. They also may need to continue focusing much of their attention on reading material that seems inaccessible to them while not receiving the degree of individual instruction that they need. They believed their hard work in

school has gone to waste if in the end they still cannot pass the test. Their comments were rich with a language of stress. There was much focus on passing, failing, and feeling strained by the process. The discourses at work in the theme oppression are discussed as follows.

Responding to pressure with nervousness

As Masey and Sabrina explained, from the very beginning of the academic year, the remediation students encounter emphasis on the FCAT in school. Knowing that their school will be graded on how the students perform and feeling pressure from the administration to lead their students to success, teachers focus the majority of instructional time on preparing students for the test. Teachers push the remediation students hard by reminding them of what is at stake if they fail—further remediation and not qualifying for graduation. The students hear “FCAT” continually while on campus for several months prior to the administration of the test. When they do finally sit down to take the exam, many feel nervous. Sabrina described how the “pressure” makes her want to do everything “right,” how it leads her to lose “focus,” and how she has felt even greater stress when having trouble with comprehension. The trouble she has with maintaining her focus and with comprehension, the more nervous she becomes, and the cycle continues. George mentioned how he can “just feel the nervousness when you walk in” the testing room. The nervousness causes him to forget what he has read. Although he may reread a passage, he continues to have trouble retaining the information. Nicolette talked about how she “can’t concentrate,” “can’t focus” when she feels “really nervous” about the test. She stated that she becomes distracted with concern over making mistakes. As a teacher administering the FCAT myself, I have witnessed students rushing out of the testing room to vomit in a nearby restroom.

Responding to pressure through avoidance

When the pressure has felt too great, the nervousness too uncomfortable, some students have chosen to avoid the stress by arbitrarily filling in the bubbles on their test answer sheets. George shared that when he feels nervous and has trouble retaining information from the passages, he will “just start bubbling answers.” Sabrina not only admitted to doing the same thing, she was emphatic about doing so. She seemed to feel entitled to sabotaging her performance in this way as she complained of continued problems with losing focus during the test (“I got bad focus”) and feeling nervous (“I tried to stay focused off the nerves, and it just came back”). When she has trouble comprehending what she has read and recalling information, she “just start[s] bubbling in answers.” She emphasized how she “had fun” making a “tree” pattern of filled-in answer bubbles and, with joy in her voice, described how she would do it. The testing experience has been too difficult for students like George and Sabrina. They felt ill-equipped to take the FCAT and resorted to avoiding it, which has led to failing scores, further remediation, and a jeopardized graduation.

Building Tasks

Gee (2005) also introduces the concept of building tasks, which he states are seven areas of reality that we construct through our use of language and nonlinguistic forms of communication. These areas include significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics (the distribution of social goods), connections, and sign systems and knowledge (pp. 11-13). As mentioned in chapter 3, for the purposes of this study, the building tasks of politics and sign systems and knowledge are considered. The task of significance is addressed through the thematic analysis that is presented, along with the study of the macro- and microstructure of the transcript excerpts. For politics, the question the researcher must answer is, “What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?” And, for sign systems and

knowledge, she responds to, “How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems...or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?”

For the student theme of textual opacity, their perspective on politics seemed to be that they do not possess the social good demanded by the FCAT program: information processing skills deemed by the state as necessary for high school graduation. They also said indirectly that they are not receiving a fair opportunity to obtain this good because the text they must negotiate to do so is inaccessible to them. While taking the FCAT, they have been consumed with doubt about whether they would be able to demonstrate proficiency. Some were convinced that despite remediation, they would be unable to perform as required and would therefore disengage from the test.

With regard to sign systems and knowledge, the students stated indirectly that American English text passages deemed by the state to be associated with high school reading levels are privileged over other forms of text, especially those commonly used by the students in their homes and subcultures, including the narrative texts they prefer to read. A mastery of state-sanctioned text is required, regardless of their skills in processing other forms of text. They also indirectly expressed an understanding that there are specific interpretations of the assigned texts regarded as appropriate by the state, and that these interpretations must be the focus of the students’ comprehension efforts. They understood that their decoding must arrive at these interpretations if it is to be considered valid by teachers, computer assessment preparation programs, and test booklet reviewers. Their lack of fluency in 10th grade textual complexity, especially in expository form, continues to separate them from full access to the high school curriculum.

The theme oppression, together with the themes textual opacity and need for individualized instruction, is encompassed by the general student theme exclusion. The thematic analysis conducted for the student data has provided a basis for the discourse analysis performed. Next, the same analytical approaches as applied to the teachers' contributions are discussed.

The Experience of Reading Instruction: Teachers

Nonconductive Elements

The teachers often talked about how they attempted to meet their students' needs despite working within a context that was not conducive to their remediation. They discussed, among other issues, not having enough time, having too many students in their class, student transience and poor attendance, a lack of autonomy, and the degree of reading deficits the students bring to the classroom. When Mrs. Otero was asked if any particular teaching method seemed more effective than others, she focused on classroom management issues.

Excerpt 11.

Working with a small group of students

- 1a. I think the most effective thing that happens in my classroom is small groups
- 1b. because they [the teacher-led groups] are right there with me
- 1c. and when we expect other students to work at centers
- 1d. it just doesn't go very well.
2. So, I worry that the work that they're doing is not helping them.
3. Now, they're required to do certain things...
- 4a. but if I don't monitor it...
- 4b. stay on them
- 4c. it doesn't get accomplished.
5. So, I think a lot of learning is not taking place when we're at those centers.
- 6a. Now, in small group, they're all right at a table with me
- 6b. and a lot gets done there.
- 7a. I can keep them more focused
- 7b. but it's hard to do that
- 7c. and watch the computers....

Vocabulary development in the small group

8. I think that when we read and discuss, we take care of our vocabulary....

- 9a. And, I think that's what a lot of these students have
9b. their vocabulary's weak
9c. so they don't understand when they read.

Managing the other centers from the small group

- 10a. (in an elevated voice and tone of frustration) When they're at FCAT Explorer (deep sigh), I constantly have to say, "Get off the Internet..."
10b. You can only do FCAT Explorer."
11. That's a waste of my time! (emphatically)
12. And, I just, I don't know how we're going to correct that problem....
(O314T2-C, 135-175)

In the Intensive Reading classes, the teachers are required to manage a system of small reading activity centers. With this system, small groups of students are assigned to each of several centers, at least one of which involves working with the computer-based FCAT Explorer program and another in which the students work directly with the teacher, who leads the group in a variety of reading activities. After a specific period of time has elapsed, the students rotate to different centers.

Mrs. Otero believed that her most effective work is done with the teacher-led group, using discussion-based activities in which she can directly monitor the students' comprehension. She suspected that the students at the other centers have not been benefiting much instructionally from those activities, especially those stationed at the computers whom she must repeatedly tell to "get off the Internet" and to get back to the FCAT Explorer program. She explained that having to keep the students at the other centers on task has distracted her from her center work. She described the specific things she did with her group and how they have worked together to address deficiencies, especially comprehension and vocabulary. However, she eventually began to express exasperation at how she has struggled to keep the other students engaged in their work and described that effort as a "waste of my time," almost yelling this statement in an angry voice. She communicated a feeling of hopelessness when she said that she "doesn't know how we're

going to correct that problem.” As she made this last statement, her voice fell significantly. She seemed frustrated about having been unable to focus primarily on the work she is able to do in her center. While she was convinced of its effectiveness, she was regularly drawn away from it to manage the other groups. Her words of focus related to what can be accomplished in her group, how this work is being undermined, and the questionable benefit of maintaining the other centers. Regardless of the rationale, she believed the situation was “not helping” and did not see the FCAT scores rising as a result of the effort.

When asked what changes she would make to how teachers help students with their reading at her school, Mrs. Thompson discussed teacher experience and how working with the teacher-led group is effective but that doing so is difficult because of classroom management issues.

Excerpt 12.

The teacher’s suitability

- 1a. A reading teacher has to be somebody with a lot of experience
- 1b. with a lot of background.
2. And, putting a brand new teacher with no experience in a reading class is the most insane thing I’ve ever heard of in my life.
3. And, I’m a prime example of that.
4. But, fortunately, that’s where my career is headed.
- 5a. I wanted to teach reading
- 5b. but I know there’s been lots of situations where there’s reading teachers who have no desire to be a reading teacher.
- 5c. And, that needs to be stopped....

Class size and management of learning

6. I think class size needs to be really looked at...to find out the optimum [number]....
7. Discipline is a huge issue in all intensive classes....
8. because you are dealing with frustrated students who can’t read....
9. it’s almost impossible to get learning accomplished
- 10a. So, I would really make it...“You’re in here to learn.
- 10b. If you don’t want to do it, you’re out of here.”

11. And, so we can get those who really do want to improve their reading skills to improve them....

Maintaining the teacher-led group

- 12a. The best way to work that I have found is in small groups
12b. that one-one-one contact that the student gets
12c. where you can see if they're getting it or not
13a. But to try to maintain that small group while you have two other groups going,
13b. and that whole behavior thing going on
13c. it's like running a three-ring circus sometimes. (T314T2-C, 263-290)

While Mrs. Thompson apparently wanted to teach reading, she suggested that she was not prepared for the job when she said that she was a “prime example” of the “insane” nature of assigning an inexperienced teacher to a reading remediation class. She believed that there were reading teachers who did not want that assignment and that the misalignment of teacher to course “needs to be stopped.”

After she discussed the suitability of a teacher for reading remediation, she talked about her experience with classroom management problems that were exacerbated by the system of reading centers she had to maintain in her class. She echoed Mrs. Otero’s comments when she mentioned how she believed the small, teacher-led group was the most effective for reading remediation since she could work directly with students and closely monitor their comprehension. She also struggled, though, with attempting to maintain that group activity while managing the other groups. She described class size as a “huge issue” and contended that the majority of remediation students were “frustrated” and “can’t read.” She stated that it was “almost impossible to get learning accomplished” in such a class and likened it to a “three-ring circus.” If she could, she would eject those students who disrupt her efforts so that she may focus on those students who “really do want to improve their reading skills.” Most of her words of focus related to the issue of her being diverted from her preferred focus on instruction.

Mrs. Hoskins introduced the problem of student transience and attire, and Mrs. Otero, in response, discussed her problem with student attendance and then commented about the transience issue.

Excerpt 13.

Student transience

1. Hoskins: Don't change them [the classes] so much.
2. There's always transition and change [new students, student schedule changes] at the beginning of the year [or semester].
- 3a. I understand that
- 3b. but it really just throws you for a loop
- 3c. when someone new comes in
- 3d. or someone leaves and goes to even a different time slot
4. That's hard....

Student attire

5. It really makes sense [to teach a gender-based class]
- 6a. because at the high school age, it's such a distraction
- 6b. when a girl walks in and is scantly clad.
- 7a. I mean you've lost your class for the day almost
- 7b. and that happens all the time.

Student attendance

8. Otero: My big thing is we need to do something about them being responsible for their attendance.
9. Attendance is awful.
- 10a. You cannot miss three weeks of school
- 10b. and come back and pick up where you were
- 10c. because we're...in the middle of a new novel
- 10d. or we're in the middle of something else
- 10e. and it's just impossible.
- 11a. The school needs to do something
- 11b. and I don't know how they're going to fix that problem.

Mrs. Hoskins and Mrs. Otero have been impeded in their efforts to work with their students because of the fluid nature of their classroom population, caused by poor attendance and frequent reassignment of students from one class to another. While Hoskins also mentioned the frequent

disruptions caused by student attire, Otero focused on the issue of the ever-shifting student presence. They both used strong language to describe their feelings of frustration: “throws you for a loop,” “that’s hard,” “such a distraction,” “lost your class,” “happens all the time,” “awful,” “it’s just impossible,” “drives me crazy.” Their words of focus related to these feelings and their specific causes. And, as with an earlier excerpt, Mrs. Otero occasionally indicated a feeling of hopelessness with her use of the phrase “I don’t know”: “I don’t know how they’re going to fix that problem” (line 11) and, stated later in the discussion, “I don’t know how to fix attendance.” She also indicated a feeling of resentment when she discussed how the school has not sought her input on assigning students to her classes and has done so in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. She is expected to control, to manage, the learning situation, but she does not believe she has control over critical elements of the teaching and learning process.

At one point, Thompson stated that she was withholding potentially controversial views regarding the issues addressed in the discussions. Perhaps, she was feeling much more frustrated about her school’s reading remediation program and its context than she indicated in her responses. And, she was adamant about not revealing anything about what she did not express in the discussions. During the second focus group discussion, Thompson at least revealed that she viewed her job as daunting.

Excerpt 14.

- 1a. Sometimes, I feel like we’re swimming over a humongous, immensely deep hole (chuckles)
- 1b. and we can’t see the bottom of it
- 1c. and, we’re just trying to figure out what’s in it....
2. There’s a lot we don’t know.
- 3a. It just seems like we’re struggling through
- 3b. trying to find our way.
4. Which works?
5. How do you teach?
6. They’re not children anymore.

7. They're young adults.
8. How do you teach them reading at an adult level?
9. And, I think that's—we're still learning. (T314T2-C, 61-73)

Her words of focus related to how the reading teachers have endeavored to solve a mystery, although the solution has continued to elude them. They are responsible for teaching “young adults” how to read and process grade-level material, but they do not know how best to do that, especially given the contextual impediments they have discussed. Otero and Thompson have emphasized the effectiveness of leading activities within a small group so that they can directly and intimately facilitate student learning. And, although not quoted above, Hoskins also stated that she believes that one-on-one and small group instruction is the form of teacher assistance that is most beneficial to the students (426SD-E, 40-42). Recall that the students themselves have asked for more one-on-one instruction. What both sides want has not occurred, and they have continued to experience remediation within a context that they have argued is not conducive. The discourses at work in the theme nonconducive elements are discussed below.

Blaming the system

When discussing the difficulties associated with teaching reading to LSES students, the teachers deflected some responsibility by partly blaming the system within which they operate. They stated, for example, that they felt most effective when working directly with a small group. They believed that their efforts were undermined, however, by their having to keep the students who were working at the other centers on task. Otero in particular described this distraction as a “waste of her time” and stated that “a lot of learning is not taking place” when the students are at the other centers. She did not, though, assume responsibility for this (see Excerpts 11 and 12). The teachers also argued that they have too many students to manage in a given class and that they must contend with unstable class rolls as students are enrolled, withdrawn, or moved to other teachers (see Excerpt 13). Thompson complained that teachers who do not want to teach

reading and/or have not been trained to do so are assigned to remediation classes anyway (which is often due to a shortage of qualified secondary reading teachers—see Excerpt 12).

Blaming the student

The teachers also held the students partly responsible for their own reading struggles. They described their lack of focus and motivation, their off-task behaviors, the discipline problems they present, their poor attendance, and even their attire as obstacles to learning. Comparing her job to managing a “three-ring circus,” Thompson wanted the authority to eject any student who derails her efforts to teach those who “want to improve” (see Excerpts 11-13).

Claiming to be inadequately prepared

The teachers discussed their training as another cause for their students’ lack of improvement. Thompson believed that an effective reading teacher is one with “a lot of experience, with a lot of background” but argued that such candidates are often not hired to fill the positions. She was hired with “no experience in a reading class” and described the decision to place her in this setting as “insane.” She characterized the RHS reading teachers as “struggling through, trying to find our way,” confessing that “there’s a lot we don’t know” (see Excerpts 12 and 14).

In short, the teachers (and the students) have learned that the most effective way to remediate reading comprehension skills is through one-on-one and small, teacher-led group instruction. Despite this fact, these teachers are required to deliver remediation from within a system that involves a variety of elements that are not conducive to their work, a system that by design impedes their instruction. Their work is also undermined by disruptive student behavior, a lack of student engagement, and a lack of teacher training.

Student Motivation

Given the students' experiences with their high school reading remediation and how they view those experiences, teachers have understandably encountered difficulty in motivating them to apply sufficient effort to their reading tasks and testing. As previously discussed, the students generally disliked the material they have been asked to read because they either did not understand it or found it boring, and they felt neglected because of a lack of individualized instruction. Many had daydreamed during reading activities, sabotaged their performance on the FCAT, and felt oppressed by being forced to endure these circumstances and by the pressure associated with the testing program.

In discussing their experiences with trying to motivate students, the teachers talked about the lack of appeal of the reading materials, how the students do not receive adequate individualized instruction, and how students often refuse to do what is assigned. Mrs. Hoskins, for example, discussed her students' lack of interest in an FCAT preparation book she begins using in class at the beginning of the school year.

Excerpt 15.

- 1a. Well, I know when William was asked the one question about what he wanted to change...
- 1b. he started answering...by saying "Let's get rid of the blue FCAT book."
- 2a. And, I don't just hear that from William
- 2b. I hear it from everybody...
- 3. I agree with all of the kids in the choices of articles....
- 4a. And, so, I'd like to see a pretest in Intensive Reading classes that...captivates the kids' interest
- 4b. because it's a big determiner on where they are.
- 5a. If they're going to shut down because the article's boring
- 5b. how are we getting a good guideline of their skills? (H314T1-C, 267-286)

Mrs. Hoskins felt compelled to use the "blue FCAT book" pretest as a diagnostic tool to determine where her students were developmentally so that she could then base her instruction on their needs. She knew that they did not like the reading passages and even agreed with how

they felt. She understood, though, that if her students “shut down” because of what they were being asked to do, then the validity of the pretest results is questionable. Her words of focus related to aspects of FCAT preparation and how her students have reacted to it. In Mrs. Hoskins’ class, from day one, the students have found themselves facing the reading material that they commonly dislike, the same type of passages with which they have already been struggling. Yet, they have been required to process such material for the purpose of demonstrating comprehension. And, after Hoskins’ students have taken the FCAT, they have tended to disengage from her remediation class because they understand that the course was designed to prepare them for the test.

Excerpt 16.

- 1a. I know as soon as I say, “Remember, guys, you charted your pre-tests for FCAT, let’s just do that post
- 1b. they’re going to shut down on me....
- 2a. I have very high-level students tell me “I was bored on FCAT day
- 2b. I didn’t care for those articles
- 2c. I Christmas-treed.”
- 2d. and...they have very high Lexile scores [reading level given by a test from the Scholastic Reading Inventory—high school is 1000 and up—a lot of her students are at the fourth grade level and above—400s, 500s, 600s, 700s]
- 2e. and they should not be in Intensive Reading
- 2f. but they are. (426TD, 159-164)

Regardless of their ability level, some remediation students have “Christmas-treed” their FCAT answer sheets because they have rejected what they have been asked to do on the test. Although the students Hoskins mentioned may have “very high Lexile scores,” based on their Scholastic Reading Inventory results, they have failed the FCAT previously, which has led to their enrollment in Intensive Reading. According to Hoskins’ account, from the first day of class, her students were not motivated to begin preparing for the FCAT, and some were not motivated to perform on the test. Most disengaged from her class after taking the test because they concluded

that they should be finished with FCAT work for the remainder of the school year. They have at least sat through the administration of the test and should not have to deal with it further.

Like Mrs. Hoskins, Mrs. Otero has had trouble getting her students to engage with the type of reading material that is consistent with what is offered on the FCAT and has found herself attempting to force them to do so.

Excerpt 17.

- 1a. I want to instill in them the love of reading
- 1b. but it's hard...
2. Most of the students love the Blueford books....
3. But, they're like a 7th grade level.
- 4a. It can't be a high level
- 4b. and it's got to be interesting.
5. They don't really like informative-type materials.
6. They like stories, you know, narratives.
- 7a. But, I do find that most of my students would rather read something that's lower than their Lexile
- 7b. and that...deals with today, [with the] problems of today
- 7c. and not necessarily something 200 years ago. (O313T1-C, 43-53)

Although Mrs. Otero's students "love" the "Blueford [Series] books," they consist of narrative text that is below the students' grade level. She wanted to "instill in them a love of reading," but she found that "hard" because she felt compelled to require that they tackle reading activities that they strongly dislike. Her words of focus related to feeling caught between what the students enjoy reading and what she must direct them to read instead.

When asked to react to a quote from Mrs. Hoskins (from a passage discussed above), Mrs. Otero and Mrs. Thompson elaborated on the issue of student motivation as it relates to reading materials and testing.

Excerpt 18.

1. Question: I'd like to get your reaction to something Mrs. Hoskins said....
If they're going to shut down because the article's boring, how are

we getting a good guideline of their skills? (H314T1-C, 284-286)

2. She was referring to FCAT-related materials.
3. Otero: Amen!
- 4a. That is so...that's what I think we all are concerned about
- 4b. because they do shut down.
5. If it's something that looks like it's going to talk about a refrigerator...they're not going to do it!
- 6a. I believe if they would change the stories on the FCAT
- 6b. I believe the students would do a lot better.
- 7a. And I don't know who's the guru up there
- 7b. [who] says they have to be expository stories
- 7c. but the state guy sat in my classroom
- 7d. and said, "Well they need to learn to do it because it's on the test."
- 8a. But, why can't the test be changed (pause)
- 8b. to at least include some interesting things for them?
- 9a. Thompson: Well, you see it on the SRI
- 9b. because SRI is a lot of narrative stories
10. Otero: Mmm hmm!
- 9c. Thompson: and they do very well on the narrative stories.
11. And again it's almost, it's like being talked down to.
12. They know it's a game.
13. It really is kind of a game.
- 14a. It's, "We're going to give you the most boring stories just to test you on these benchmarks"
- 14b. and they're really putting their backs up against it
- 14c. saying "Well," you know, "I'm not going to do it."
15. Because they know they're not being tested on something that's going to be useful in the long run. (426TD-E, 669-708)

According to these teachers, the state has maintained a fundamental disconnect between how it expects students to demonstrate grade-level reading comprehension and what the students are willing to do to develop their reading skills. As opposed to the "guru up there," the teachers have direct access to the students' reactions to the state's testing program, and they know that the students put "their backs up against it" and have refused to comply. Their words of focus related to this conflict between the state and the students. The teachers are seemingly caught in the middle when attempting to obtain the students' cooperation. They see the students as being set up by the state to lose this "game," an alleged competition of wills, as the state continues to

deliver the “most boring stories just to test you on these benchmarks.” And, they believe that the students do not see the testing program as being relevant to their lives. Otero and Thompson spoke in elevated voices and in tones of frustration when commenting on this issue.

Upon concluding the last discussion, when the teachers were asked if they had anything to add, Mrs. Otero described the degree of student frustration.

Excerpt 19.

- 1a. I wish you had some input in Tallahassee (laughing)
- 1b. because I just don't see our kids progressing very well.
- 2a. And every week you have another saying, “I quit school”
- 2b. or “I'm going into the night program.”
3. And, you think, “Oh, kids.” (pause) (426TD-E, 927-931)

Otero has encountered students who are so repulsed by their schooling experience that they quit. Although factors other than reading remediation and the FCAT may be at issue for them, Otero nonetheless relates this problem to the state's mandatory testing program. Despite her best efforts, she did not see the remediation students “progressing very well.” Her words of focus related to how strongly the students have felt about what they endure at school and to how strongly Otero felt as well. In a recent edition of the local newspaper, a school district official states, “many [of the district's] students drop out of school after having failed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Students are getting discouraged....FCAT has probably been the biggest problem with dropouts” (_____ News, 2006, p. 7A.). The discourses at work in the theme student motivation are discussed as follows.

Advocating for students by conveying their feelings

While the teachers had mitigated their sense of responsibility for the reading achievement of their students by blaming the system, blaming the student, and claiming to be inadequately prepared, they also advocated for their students. They advocated for the students in one respect by conveying their feelings about the remediation program. They discussed how the students (1)

wanted to “get rid of the blue FCAT book” because they found the articles boring (to such a degree that they “Christmas-treed” their FCAT answer sheet), (2) loved the 7th-grade-level narrative texts in the Blueford books while detesting informational texts, (3) preferred to read about issues that were relevant to them, and (4) would rather quit school than be driven to face the FCAT and thereby continue to endure remediation (see Excerpts 15-19). The teachers viewed the students’ feelings as important and relevant to the discussion of effective remediation, so much so that they also defended the students’ interests.

Advocating for students by defending their interests

As the teachers described their students’ feelings about what they are required to read, they also justified their sense of frustration. The teachers talked about how their students tend to “shut down” when they are forced to examine text that they would rather avoid and that when this occurs, determining their levels of development may be difficult (see Excerpts 15 and 18). They argued for the inclusion of texts that are more interesting to the students, especially narrative pieces that address issues that seem relevant to them. Hoskins stated that some of her students were assigned to her class only because they had failed the FCAT. However, as indicated by their Lexile scores, they were capable readers. Wishing that I had some “input in Tallahassee,” Otero asked why the test cannot be altered so that it may seem more accessible and more engaging to students. Thompson, meanwhile, accused the state of toying with the students, forcing “the most boring stories” on them for the purpose of determining whether they have met the standards. She sympathized with the students who have resisted a reading program that they deem irrelevant. Both teachers mentioned that the students perform far better on the Scholastic Reading Inventory because it is driven in part by their choices of text.

Instruction Outside the Content Areas

Mrs. Thompson devoted much of her time in the meetings to asserting that reading should not be taught in isolation but within the context of core courses, like English, mathematics, science, and social studies. This issue arose so frequently, because of Thompson's focus on it, that it emerged as the third teacher theme. Mrs. Otero first addressed this issue as she expressed concern over the students' ability to process course textbook information.

Excerpt 20.

- 1a. I worry about them not understanding the science and social studies, and even math
- 1b. when it comes to reading math problems....
- 2a. They need to get practice in reading informational-type, expository-type, writings
- 2b. where they would rather read narratives, most of my students....
- 3a. They've got to have practice that way
- 3b. and sometimes, I think students don't know how to approach a textbook.
4. I've seen that because of being in fourth grade.
5. That was the first year most of them had textbooks.
- 6a. And, if you didn't teach them how to read a textbook
- 6b. and show them the components of a textbook
- 6c. they had no clue. (O314T2-C, 357-374)

Not only was Otero concerned that her students do not understand what they are reading in her class, she worried about their not learning how to read textbooks, which consist mainly of the same "informational-type, expository-type" writings the students encounter on the FCAT. She understood that her students want to enjoy what they read, and that they do not like reading textbook-like passages. She knew that regardless of their reading preferences, her students must practice working with the types of text that they will experience on the test. She also discussed, although not included above, how she was willing to incorporate reading content from their core courses in order to help them develop their processing skills. Her words of focus related to the issues of student understanding and student preference versus state requirements. Otero felt caught between what her students want to read and what they are required to read.

Mrs. Thompson could not have agreed more with the notion that reading remediation should be linked to core course content. When asked what changes she would make to the remediation program's activities and assignments if she were in charge, she responded as follows.

Excerpt 21.

- 1a. The most important thing, that's been my beef since the get-go...
- 1b. is the content of the reading....
2. In reading class, there is no content.
3. There is no subject you're trying to convey to them other than strategies for reading.
- 4a. So, the challenge is finding shopping articles
- 4b. finding things that are meaningful to their life
- 4c. because if you're just—my discipline problems immediately happen
- 4d. when they realize that this is not applicable to their life whatsoever
- 4e. and it's not going to benefit them.
5. Yet, if I was a science teacher, I would say, “You need to know this because we need to go to this next point in this science lesson.”
6. In reading, you can't say that about an isolated article, per se....
7. I'm not sure isolating reading by itself is the way to go.
- 8a. I almost see reading teachers as partners with content-area teachers in high school...
- 8b. working in small groups, like my students enjoy
- 8d. because that's where it is most beneficial.
9. The small groups definitely do work for me and for my students.
- 10a. I can see where they're having problems
- 10b. and when they're getting it.
- 11a. But, it's really the content, the reading content
- 11b. that I've struggled with the most...
- 11c. Because I can teach them main idea
- 11d. I can teach them how to make inferences
- 11e. I can teach them how to compare and contrast
- 11f. but if it's isolated things that have no meaning to their life
- 11g. it doesn't work. (T313T1-C, 244-271)

Because she has to teach reading in isolation—a course separate from content-area courses—

Thompson has felt driven to find reading materials that cater to the students' interests, like

“shopping articles,” in order to engage them in the remediation activities. She explained that if

she does not do this, then the students will determine that they are doing “isolated things that

have no meaning to their life,” which will lead to discipline problems. She envisioned a partnership between reading and content-area teachers as the solution, delivering reading remediation within the context of core content. She believed that her ability to teach specific reading skills would then be more effective. This is the issue she has “struggled with the most.” Her words of focus related to the same issue as those of the Otero passage above—feeling caught between what the students want in their remediation program and what they are required to read.

Thompson also stated that the remediation program, the notion of delivering a reading course separate from core content, is not conducive to student success and that this problem renders the FCAT an invalid measure of reading comprehension.

Excerpt 22.

1. My opinion on how students are tested for reading overall, including the state, is that I think FCAT is not an appropriate tool....
- 2a. It's not working
- 2b. because we're not teaching knowledge
- 2c. and without the knowledge, the skills are useless.
3. to me that's the problem with the testing...
- 4a. there's not a knowledge foundation to build the reading skills around...
- 4b. it's so piecemealed....
- 4c. that is the biggest thing with my students
5. is they do not have background knowledge.
6. Can I instill it in them?
- 7a. Yes, if I have a content area
- 7b. and I know what my content is
- 7c. and I know where they're weak in their background knowledge
- 7d. I can assess that.
8. I can then build their reading skills around that.
9. But without a content to build knowledge, those basic benchmark skills are useless.
- 10a. And if that to me is what FCAT is testing on
- 10b. can they find the main idea
- 10c. can they infer
- 10d. can they compare and contrast without a specific knowledge base
- 10e. this is what we want our students to know
- 10f. it's useless. (426TD-E, 173-194)

During this later discussion, Thompson repeated much of what she said earlier, but she seemed more emphatic about how “useless” it is to teach reading skills isolated from core content. She did not believe in the design of the remediation program or in the use of the FCAT, which drives the design. For her, this approach to reading instruction was “not working,” and she maintained that that she could teach effectively only from within the context of core content. Her words of focus continued to relate to her rejection of teaching “benchmark skills,” without the content around which to “build” them. And, if the decision were hers, she would do away with the Intensive Reading course in its current form altogether, as she explained when asked what changes she would make to how students are tested on their reading ability.

Thompson did not believe in the state’s testing program or in Rural High School’s and the local district administration’s approach to remediation. Although her students praised her for her efforts at individualizing her instruction, she did not believe they were benefiting from the class, which she saw as better suited for the elementary school, where, she said, intervention is “still possible.” Recall that Otero stated (Excerpt 20, lines 4-6c) that students begin receiving textbooks in the fourth grade and do not know how to process them unless taught how to do so. For Thompson, by the time students reach high school, they are beyond the reach of a focused intervention and best suited for content-based coursework only, and only able to grow if they are required to work with the types of reading material employed by the testing program, not the pop culture pieces they might prefer. Perhaps they still need what they needed as fourth graders—to learn how to process the course textbooks assigned to them. Such training, done with in the context of the courses with which the books are associated, would likely fulfill Thompson’s wishes for high school reading instruction. The discourse at work in the theme instruction outside the content areas is discussed below.

Defining effective secondary reading instruction and assessment

As teachers engage in reading remediation and test preparation work, they develop a sense of what works, and in the case of this study, the teachers expressed their opinions on this matter. While Otero believed that students should be learning how to process textbook information, Thompson in particular was convinced that teaching reading in isolation is ineffective. She continued to critique this approach throughout the discussions, arguing that reading teachers should work in partnership with content-area teachers so that the students may better process the related texts. In this regard, her view was similar to that of Otero. She also contended that the FCAT program is “not appropriate,” “not working,” and “useless,” since it is based on the treatment of reading as a set of isolated skills. She viewed Florida’s (and Rural High School’s) approach to reading instruction and assessment as comprising a strategy delivery system that remediation teachers are largely unable to employ because many of their students are resisting it. While she believed that teaching reading strategies through content-area courses makes them seem more relevant to the students, she had also complained that students are mainly interested in tackling pop culture articles. Regardless of their course assignment, teachers must still motivate students to process informational text, and students continue to reject such text. Thompson argued that at least a core subject teacher can force students to read by invoking the logic of the instruction at hand: “You need to know this because we need to go to this next point in this science lesson” (Excerpt 21, line 5). As the students have demonstrated, though, such an approach has no impact on the student who is determined to reject text that she sees as uninteresting, irrelevant, or both.

Building Tasks

With regard to the building task of politics, there is a social good demanded by the FCAT program: information processing skills deemed by the state to be necessary for high school

graduation and for economic self-sufficiency in American society. The teachers are required to train the students to demonstrate their possession of this good. They believe, however, that their efforts are impeded by aspects of the context within which they perform. Their question may be: If this good is indeed so important to those who set education policy, why do they not empower us to provide it to the students, and why do they not create a delivery system that is more conducive to the development of the required skills?

For the building task of sign systems and knowledge, what has been stated for the student themes continues to apply. The teachers are expected to help their students master state-mandated American English text that is associated with high school reading levels, regardless of the students' skills in processing other forms of English and other text structures, and regardless of the systemic obstacles they may encounter. The teachers understand that there are specific interpretations of the assigned texts regarded as appropriate by the state, and that their students' ability to arrive at these interpretations must be the focus of their intervention efforts.

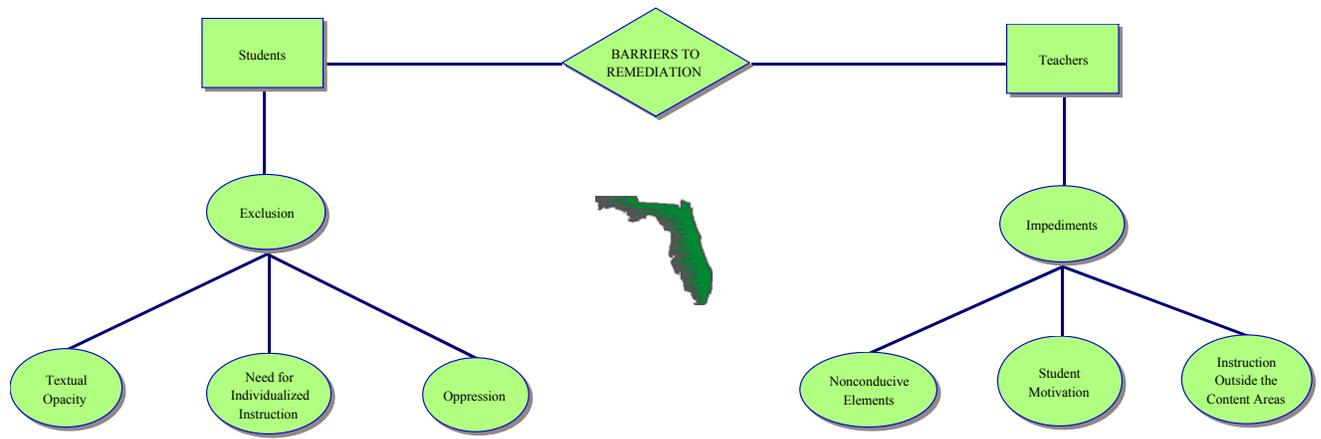


Figure 4-1. Thematic network

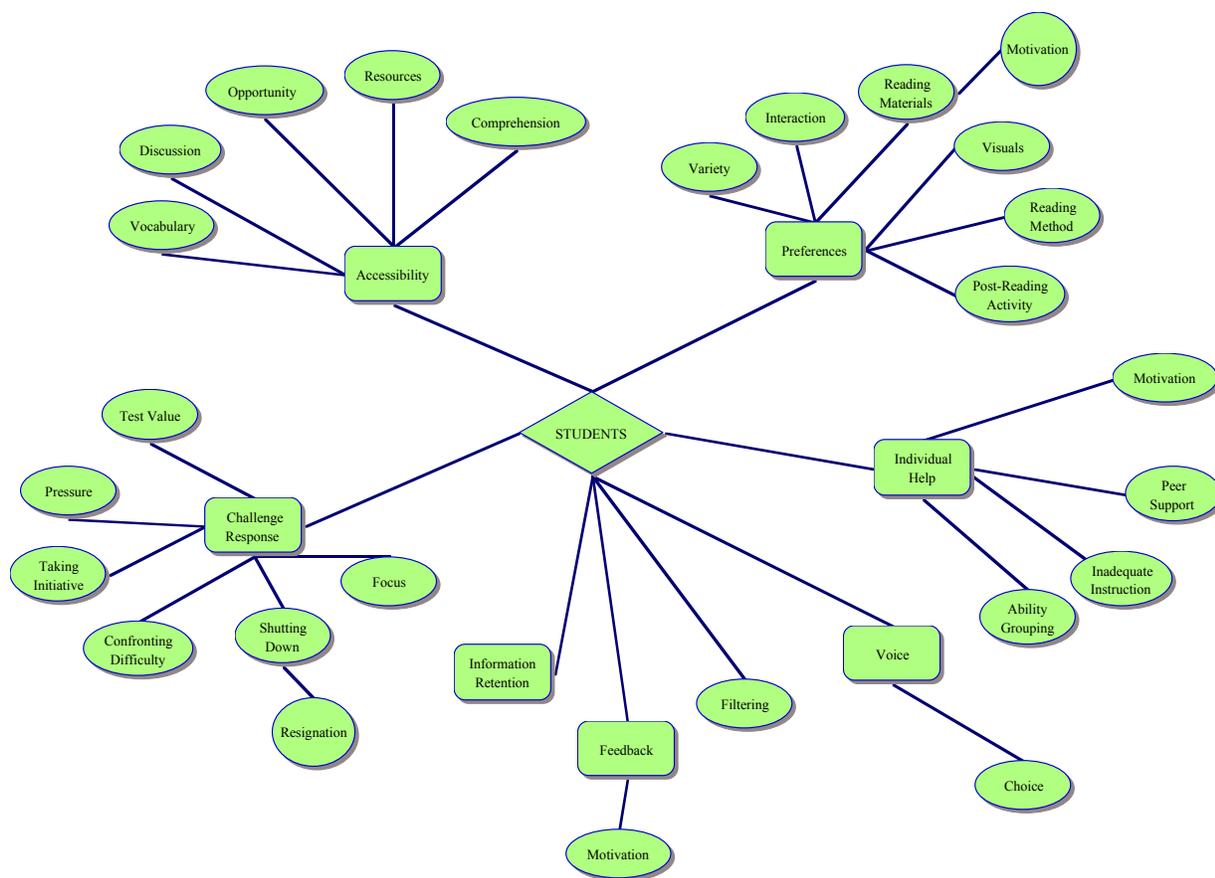


Figure 4-2. Student themes

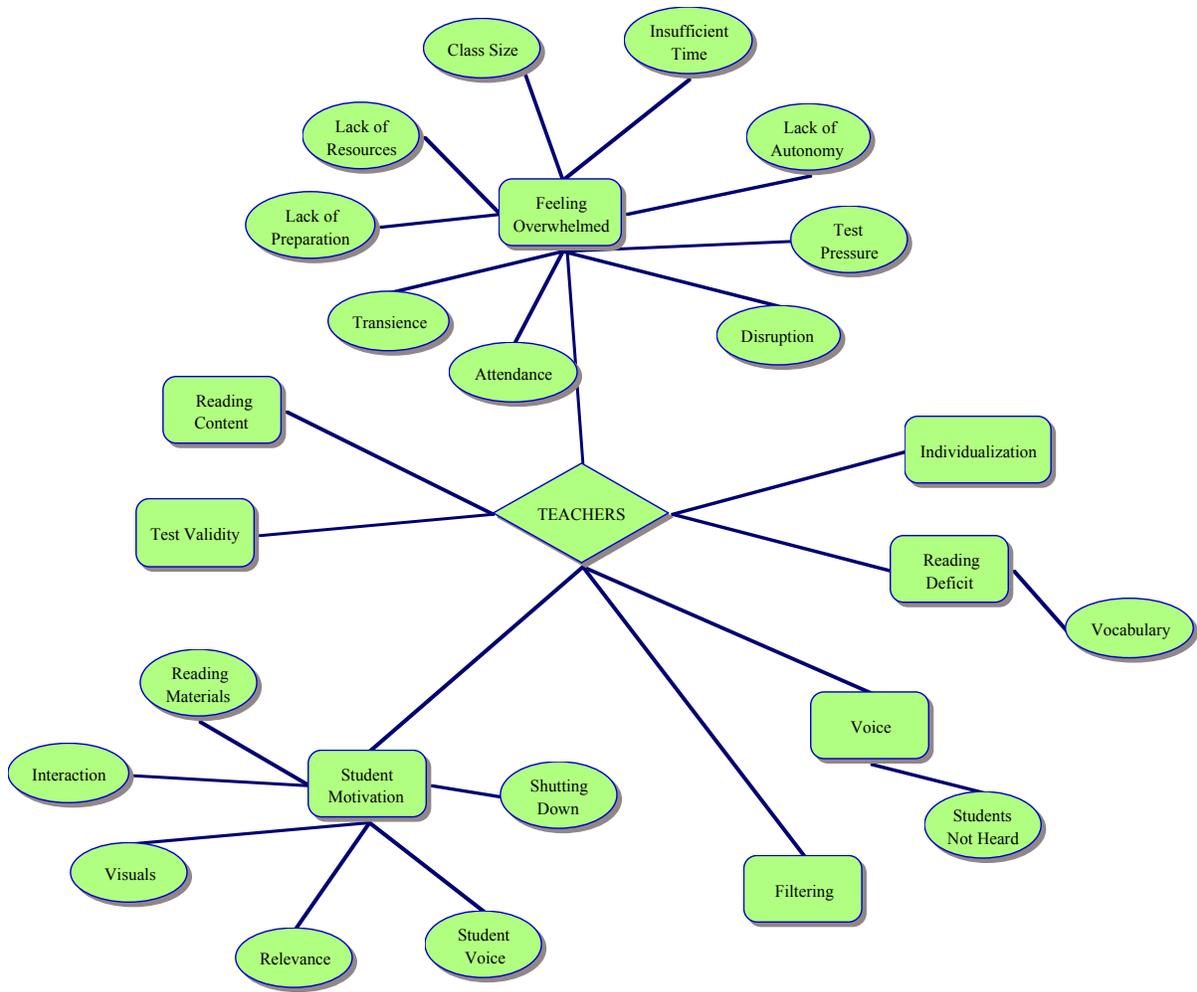


Figure 4-3. Teacher themes

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were to describe the beliefs of students of low socioeconomic status (LSES) and high school English/reading teachers concerning high school reading instruction and to promote understanding among each group regarding reading assignments, teacher assistance, and assessment of reading skills. The findings describe how the participants experience reading instruction for LSES students, how the participants construct and co-construct the meaning they derive from their experiences, and what discourses may be driving their views of reading instruction. The discussion of the results will be presented according to the following topics: (1) summary of the findings, (2) theoretical implications of the findings, (3) practical implications of the findings, and (4) recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

For the thematic analysis, the global theme was identified as barriers to remediation. Much of what the participants discussed related to how Rural High School's reading remediation program and Florida's standardized assessment program, to them, are largely ineffective in improving high school reading comprehension among those students enrolled in Intensive Reading and support the findings of McGill-Franzen and Allington (2005). The students generally felt excluded from these efforts because they were required to read texts that seemed inaccessible to them, either because of the vocabulary or the subject matter, and because they did not receive the degree of individual instruction that they desired. They also felt oppressed by a remediation system that applied ongoing and intense pressure to attain a minimum standardized test score that seemed unattainable to them, given their deficiencies and how those deficiencies were addressed. They responded to this situation by retreating, daydreaming, outright rejecting the work, and sabotaging their performance on the FCAT. They came to associate their

remediation classes with the testing pressure they felt. When discussing these issues, they engaged in discourses of resistance. Even though they faced the likelihood of not earning a high school diploma, they continued to turn away from what the state demanded of them with regard to reading grade-level expository texts and demonstrating their comprehension of them.

The teachers experienced this resistance along with other impediments to their work. They have contended with poor student attendance and transience, having too many students in class, classroom management problems, a lack of autonomy, and working with students who are reading far below their grade level. They were especially concerned because they had little opportunity to individualize instruction through one-on-one and small-group teaching. They struggled with motivating students who generally resist the remediation program by avoiding reading activities and assessments, including the FCAT, and through disengagement and underperformance. Mrs. Thompson, in particular, believed that teaching reading in isolation is largely ineffective. She maintained that remediation should occur within the context of core course content, and Mrs. Otero believed that this can best be done by teaching students how to process textbook information.

Based upon the application of components of Gee's (2005) discourse analysis method, several discourses appear to be at work in the focus group discussions. The students seemed to be using the following discourses: (1) being a student, (2) coping through retreat, (3) coping through distraction, (4) coping through rejection, (5) success through personal coaching, (6) success through addressing deficits, (7) success through breaking it down, (8) success through meeting us at our level, (9) responding to pressure with nervousness, and (10) responding to pressure through avoidance. The teachers seemed to be using several other discourses: (1) being a teacher, (2) blaming the system, (3) blaming the student, (4) claiming to be inadequately

prepared, (5) advocating for students by conveying their feelings, (6) advocating for students by defending their interests, and (7) defining effective secondary reading instruction and assessment. Finally, I used the discourse of being an academic researcher. All of the discourses, aside from being a student, being a teacher, and being an academic researcher, relate in one way or another to coping with the realities of reading instruction.

Through their responses to the discussion questions, the students and teachers constructed their realities of high school reading remediation through both politics (social goods) and sign systems and knowledge. The participants viewed the social good demanded by the FCAT program as information processing skills deemed by the state as necessary for graduation and for economic self-sufficiency in American society. They also appeared to say that students were not receiving a fair opportunity to obtain this good because of the characteristics of the system within which the state and Rural High School (and its district leadership) require it be delivered.

With regard to sign systems and knowledge, the participants stated indirectly that American English text passages deemed by the state to be associated with high school reading levels are privileged over other forms of text, especially those in common use by the students themselves in their homes and subcultures, including the narrative texts they prefer to read. They also expressed indirectly an understanding that there are specific interpretations of the assigned texts regarded as appropriate by the state, and that these interpretations must be the focus of the students' comprehension efforts. They knew that the students' decoding must arrive at these interpretations if it is to be considered valid by teachers, computer assessment preparation programs, and test booklet reviewers.

Theoretical Implications of the Findings

The students and teachers have experienced FCAT requirements and reading remediation, albeit through different forms of participation, and they have processed these experiences

through the use of various discourses. They used a variety of building tasks, including politics and sign systems and knowledge to construct their realities of the remediation program (Gee, 2005, pp. 10-13), and as the researcher, I asked them to describe those realities. Through the focus group discussions, however, I participated in the forming of those realities by indirectly influencing the participants' sense-making process (e.g., through questioning, probing their responses, asking for clarification, checking for understanding) (see Gergen, 2003a, pp. 154-161 for a discussion of transformative dialogue). I also processed my experiences of the focus group discussions through the use of discourse models in order to report on the execution of this study (for a visual representation of this discussion, see Appendix B). The discourse models I was using, which are based on my experience as a high school teacher of English, are as follows:

1. Many high school students continue to struggle with grade-level reading comprehension despite efforts to remediate their text processing deficiencies.
2. Student reading deficiencies are often associated with poverty.
3. Understanding how LSES students and their teachers experience reading remediation may facilitate a more effective approach to remediation.

These models influenced my conception of this study and my collection and analysis of data.

Reality can be defined as “a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot ‘wish them away’)” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 1). For the participants, Rural High School’s reading remediation program and the FCAT are real. Regardless of how they perceive these entities, they indeed cannot “wish them away.” The students must pass the reading portion of the FCAT to receive a traditional high school diploma, and if they do not pass, they must engage in a program of remediation offered by their school. There is a larger question to consider: Why have these educational apparatuses become reality in the first place?

In order for American society to sustain itself, it must prepare its youth to maintain its institutions. Through its public schools, the society transmits “objectivated meanings of institutional activity...conceived of as ‘knowledge’ to children, and the meaning of a given institution is “based on the social recognition [by previous generations] of that institution as a ‘permanent’ solution to a ‘permanent’ problem of the collectivity” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 69-70). This process is carried out through “legitimation,” which “explains the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings” (p. 93; see also Bruner, 2003, p. 169; Gergen and Wortham, 2001, p. 119). Recall that Nagle (1999) describes literacy as the “community’s ways of using written language to serve social purposes” and “school literacy” as the “written and social language that is sanctioned in school” (“Theoretical background” section). If much of this socialization is carried out in textual form, and most likely to be delivered through informational and expository works of increasing complexity, students will need to develop an ever-increasing ability to process such texts. The Rural High School administration has responded accordingly, as they explain in their back-to-school parent newsletter for the 2005-2006 academic year:

Our English classes will be placing a heavier emphasis on non-fiction this year—such as essays, biographies and articles. Since it is estimated that 80% of the Reading text of the FCAT is non-fiction, this seems to be a move we needed to make in response to changing times and the current test with which we are confronted. (_____ High School, 2005, p. 2)

Society, however, has encountered a problem of deviance in the form of youth who, it believes, are deficient in processing such text (see Berger & Luckmann, pp. 62, 69-70, 92-94, 143, 156-157; Bruner, 2003, p. 169; Gergen, 2003a, pp. 15-16; Gergen and Wortham, p. 119).

Florida’s government, as a microcosm of the larger society, has targeted this deficiency through its FCAT program. It understands that new generations of citizens “posit a problem of compliance,” and has determined that their “socialization into the institutional order requires the

establishment of sanctions” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 62; see also Gergen, 2003a, pp. 15-16). Society seeks to ensure that all children are able to perform at prescribed levels. Students are therefore required to demonstrate their proficiency in processing informational and expository text, the complexity of which has been associated with their grade level. If they fail to demonstrate such proficiency, Florida will withhold their traditional high school diploma. Florida’s government has enlisted its teachers in the effort to carry out its program of socialization (see Phillips and Hardy, 2002, pp. 29-30, for a discussion of the use of language for social control and the legitimation of interpretation).

Teachers, however, are having trouble meeting this demand, especially with LSES students. It is widely known in the education community that non-LSES students are more likely to encounter informational and expository text in the course of their daily lives and that reading deficiencies are often associated with poverty (Denti & Guerin, 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). One could argue, therefore, that for LSES students the reality of the FCAT program seems more “artificial”—not a natural extension of their home realities (Burger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 143). For these students, teachers must:

“bring home” the contents [they] are imparting by making them vivid (that is, making them seem as alive as the “home world” of the child), relevant (that is, linking them to the relevance structures already present in the “home world) and interesting (that is, inducing the attentiveness of the child to detach itself from its “natural” objects to these more “artificial” ones). These maneuvers are necessary because an internalized reality [apparently lacking in experiences with informational and expository text processing] is already there, persistently “in the way” of new internalizations. The degree and precise character of these pedagogic techniques will vary with the motivations the individual has for the acquisition of the new knowledge. (p. 143)

As the data reflect, the students did not view the texts they must process as “vivid,” “relevant,” or “interesting,” and they therefore rejected them. The readings assigned are disconnected from their home environments or lived realities (see Luttrell & Parker, 2001, pp. 242-245; Nagle, 1999; West-Olatunji & Behar-Horenstein, 2005). By rejecting them, the students are avoiding

socialization by not developing their informational and expository text processing skills. And, their teachers have explained that they have been unable to motivate their students to engage with these texts—the students’ “internalized reality” continues to be “‘in the way.’”

The reality that the participating students have internalized was likely maintained and perhaps even strengthened by their discussing their experiences with reading remediation and the FCAT. As Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain, “Generally speaking, the conversational apparatus maintains reality by ‘talking through’ various elements of experience and allocating them a definite place in the real world” (p. 153). As the researcher, I served as a reality-maintaining other by using the same language to help “objectify unfolding biographical experience” (p. 154; see also Bruner, 2003, pp. 169-170, for a discussion of the interactional nature of making meaning; Gergen, 2003a, Gergen 2003b, and Gergen & Gergen, 2003 for a discussion of the relational self; and Gergen and Wortham, 2001, pp. 118-221). Again, discourse analysis is especially appropriate for examining this social construction and maintenance of reality since it aims to identify potential discourses used by the participants for this purpose. By examining the language the participants used to communicate their experiences and construct their realities, one may learn what leads them to say what they do about a given phenomenon and how they make sense of it. The promotion of understanding should be the cornerstone of any educational program. According to Gee (2005), “The task is this: to think more deeply about the meanings we give people’s words so as to make ourselves better, more humane people and the world a better, more humane place” (p. xii).

Practical Implications of the Findings

The implications of these findings are significant considering the high-stakes nature of Florida’s standardized assessment program and the quality of life available to the students beyond high school. While the students may have genuine reading deficiencies, they have

rejected their remediation program. As previously stated, school-sanctioned literacy practices have led students to define literacy as “text-based” and to believe that they “were not good readers if they did not like or do well in school reading and writing” and that their private literacies have no value (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, pp. 237, 242-245). Because of their literacy backgrounds, the competitive atmosphere of high schools, and the privileging of middle-class literacy histories, they feel excluded from school-based reading practices and disempowered (Nagel, 1999, “Summary of the findings” section”).

This situation is perpetuated by poor and working-class parents who believe that it is “the teacher’s job to teach,” not theirs (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2005, p. 174). It is also maintained by teachers who see “children and their families as the problem,” “specialists and separate programs...[as] the solution,” and struggling readers as “best served by a ‘slow it down and make it more concrete’ version of instruction” (p. 173). Teachers often tend to “privilege home and social background as the major factor in explaining children’s achievement at school” (Street, 2005, p. 244), helping to create a situation in which a child’s socio-economic status largely determines the literacy experiences available to her (Troutman, Unger, Ramirez, & Sadler, 2001, p. 214). West-Olatunji and Behar-Horenstein (2005) recommend a “culturally appropriate pedagogy” that is based on the view that:

Children are socialized into cultural modes of behavior that articulate a full range of developmental competencies. Thus it is argued that, if culturally diverse children arrive in the school setting with a set of distinctive and legitimate ways of being that are cognitively, linguistically, and behaviorally different...perhaps even oppositional to the normative school context, then the school failure might be the outcome of the cultural incompatibility of the schooling environment (i.e., curriculum, teaching practices, structure, content, materials, organization). (p. 10)

They argue that “the needs of the whole child” should be served and that educators should meet these needs “within the context of their families, communities, and other social systems” (p. 10).

Such an approach is absent in the current focus on standardized test performance.

Both middle and high school students believe that the standardized reading assessments they encounter serve the school's interests rather than their own, and they protect their self-esteem by deliberately withholding effort on such tests (Guthrie, 2005, pp. 286-287). By underperforming on these tests, however, the students ensure a self-fulfilling prophecy of academic failure and maintain their fiscal dependence on the very system that assessed their skills and judged them to be deficient.

If the teachers also do not believe the program in its current form is effective, the students' reading skills may improve little, if any. If teachers have openly described their own disagreement with the FCAT system and the delivery of remediation to which it leads, how efficacious can they feel and act while teaching? How is this attitude about the program communicated to the students and how might it serve to facilitate student failure? The students may continue reading below grade level and continue to fail the reading section of the FCAT. Their need to escape the pressure through avoidance outweighs whatever value they assign to graduating from high school.

Warning students like these of the loss of their diploma is an ineffective strategy for encouraging them to confront the test. They are already convinced that they cannot pass it. They may also begin to associate reading with testing and come to resent the activity altogether. Frustrated with this system, they may decide to drop out of high school (although they may choose to pursue the equivalent of a high school diploma through an alternative program). If they do not obtain a diploma, they will likely lead lives of diminished economic capacity, self-sufficiency, and adaptability. As previously stated, these are the conditions of the average member of a poverty community, and with them come dependency on government-sponsored welfare programs and a temptation towards crime as a solution (see Denti & Guerin, 2004; and

Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, for a discussion of the relationship between literacy and poverty). Furthermore, the students' capacity for lifelong learning will be compromised if they continue to struggle with reading comprehension. Potentially, society becomes the caretaker for these students for the remainder of their lives because of its ineffective educational practices.

While teachers may not be able to change the state's assessment program, they can at least create a more inclusive learning environment for LSES students by understanding that "students' positions within their figured worlds [cultural/social places of existence] need not be equated with their dispositions" (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, p. 245). They can also assume primary responsibility for their students' reading achievement, regardless of their backgrounds. Struggling readers are being lost to a tradition of finger-pointing among parents and teachers. Parents may believe that reading development is solely the duty of the school, while educators might argue that the parents have failed to prepare their children for instruction. In the meantime, these children need their teachers to "step up to the plate" as Mrs. Albright did for her students (Milner, 2002, "A Crisis Situation for Mrs. Albright" and "Sources of Persistence through a Crisis" sections.)

As for state and federal education policy-makers, they may consider that "passing a test doesn't tell us whether a child chooses to read, has the ability to select appropriate books, or has an awareness of the metacognitive aspects of being a reader" (Skolnick, 2000, p. 122). They may also acknowledge that "we have relatively little evidence that our current efforts substantially alter the educational futures of at-risk children" (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2005, p. 173). Our "current efforts" in Florida include the FCAT and how it is used. With LSES students continuing to fail the exam, teachers may feel less effective as they are subject to increasing scrutiny for their perceived role in the results. Teachers must believe in their ability

to effect change if their sense of efficacy is to be strengthened and change is to occur (Enderlin Lampe, 2002, pp. 142, 144). Teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy assign greater responsibility for learning on the students and “other nonschool factors” (Long & Biggs, 1999, Introduction). The teachers who participated in this study are feeling ineffective, given the circumstances in which they must perform and the continued struggles of their students, and they have indeed responded by blaming both the students and the system.

Recommendations for Future Research

Students

Student perspectives with regard to high school reading remediation have received relatively little attention. Further investigation into how they experience intervention programs and the standardized testing often associated with them may facilitate improved student outcomes. Since the students who participated in this study at times seemed hesitant to respond to the discussion questions, and some even admitted to filtering their comments so that they would be acceptable for an adult authority figure to hear, perhaps shadowing a similar group of students for an extended period of time would allow for greater access to their perspectives. Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Otero stated that greater insight may be gained by shadowing students who were excluded by the selection criteria, namely those LSES reading remediation students who missed class due to erratic school attendance, and those who presented classroom management challenges for the teachers because of their behavior.

Parents

Valuable insight might be gained by seeking to understand the views of parents of LSES reading remediation students. Their perspectives may help explain how and why their children resist remediation efforts. Giving them a voice might help to illuminate better ways of providing remedial instruction. Conducting a series of similar focus group discussions involving both

parents and teachers may promote mutual understanding and support. Teachers may be able to tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students more effectively if they understand their literacy histories as described by the parents. Parents may take a more active role at home if they are able to appreciate the magnitude of their children's reading deficiencies, including their specific struggles, and what their teachers are trying to accomplish.

Teachers

As stated earlier, most of the research on teacher beliefs within the context of literacy instruction has been directed at the early childhood and elementary school levels. The middle school has also received more coverage than the high school. When teacher beliefs at the high school level have been studied, relatively little attention has been paid to beliefs about literacy instruction.

Teacher beliefs impact their classroom practice (Schraw, 2001), and they influence whether and how teachers implement mandated reform programs (Gregoire, 2003). Considering that high school reading instruction is being scrutinized so closely in Florida and throughout the nation, teachers' instructional views should receive much more attention. Further studies that provide opportunities for self-reflection may help these teachers to identify internal or external barriers to belief-practice congruency, such as a lack of knowledge, skills, experience, and support; a lack of time; personal framing/interpretation tendencies; assumptions; agendas; past experiences; feelings; expectations; mandated curricula and standardized testing programs; a system that does not honor teachers or what they believe to be best for their students; a "lack of professional culture"; the school culture; and administrative impediments (Cheung & Wong, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Hofer, 2002; McCombs, 2002; Minstrell & Anderson, 2002; Pape & Hoy, 2002; Schraw and Olafson, 2002; Skandera & Sousa, 2003; Yung, 2001). Once teachers identify these barriers to belief implementation, they might be better able to devise a strategy for either

removing the barriers or accommodating them more productively. Collaborating with teachers on researching, developing, and implementing such strategies could be the subject of additional research studies. As this research continues, a new field of study—teacher belief-practice dissonance—may emerge as a key area of interest in the national movement toward elevating adolescent literacy.

Postscript

The findings in this study depict an unfortunate and pathetic example of what happens when instruction is not designed to meet the needs of a group of students who are desperately in need of high-quality, content-based instruction. Several questions, which are beyond the scope of this study, must be raised in order to comprehend what has happened to these students. First, one must wonder how these students have evolved into virtual non-readers. Have their elementary and/or middle school experiences played a role? Is the school's administration aware of this situation, and if so, to what degree? Why is this ineffective remediation program allowed to exist, and why are unqualified teachers assigned to the reading classes? Since many high school students are at risk of not passing the FCAT, how typical are these findings with regard to other LSES students in the district and in the state?

It seems that the students neither took responsibility for their own performance nor blamed their teachers. Why? Although the teachers at times blamed the students, why did they not hold themselves partly responsible? Is there a degree of learned helplessness at play on both sides? Although practitioners report situations similar to what has been described in this study, voices of LSES high school reading students have received little attention. What is our commitment to ensuring that all students will leave high school ready to enter college, a technical training program, or the workforce? Perhaps the findings of this study and the questions that have emerged will serve as an impetus for creating awareness and pursuing change.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

Negotiation of Reading Conditions (Round 1, Monday, March 13)

1. Please tell us who you are, the grade you're in, and what you like most about high school.
2. Do you like to read?
 - a. (IF YES): What do you like about reading?
 - b. (IF NO): What would it take to get you to like reading more?
3. What is your opinion about how reading is taught in high school?
4. Think back to a reading activity or assignment you have had in your reading class that you enjoyed. Describe it.
5. What other kinds of reading activities or assignments have you had in your reading class?
6. Which activities or assignments do you think have helped improve your reading the most?
 - a. How did they help you?
7. Which reading activities or assignments have you enjoyed the most?
 - a. What was enjoyable about them?
8. If you were in charge of reading activities and assignments in the high school, what changes would you make?
9. What do you think have been the most important points made during this discussion?
10. Would anyone like to say anything more about reading activities or assignments?

Negotiation of Teacher Assistance (Round 2, Tuesday, March 14)

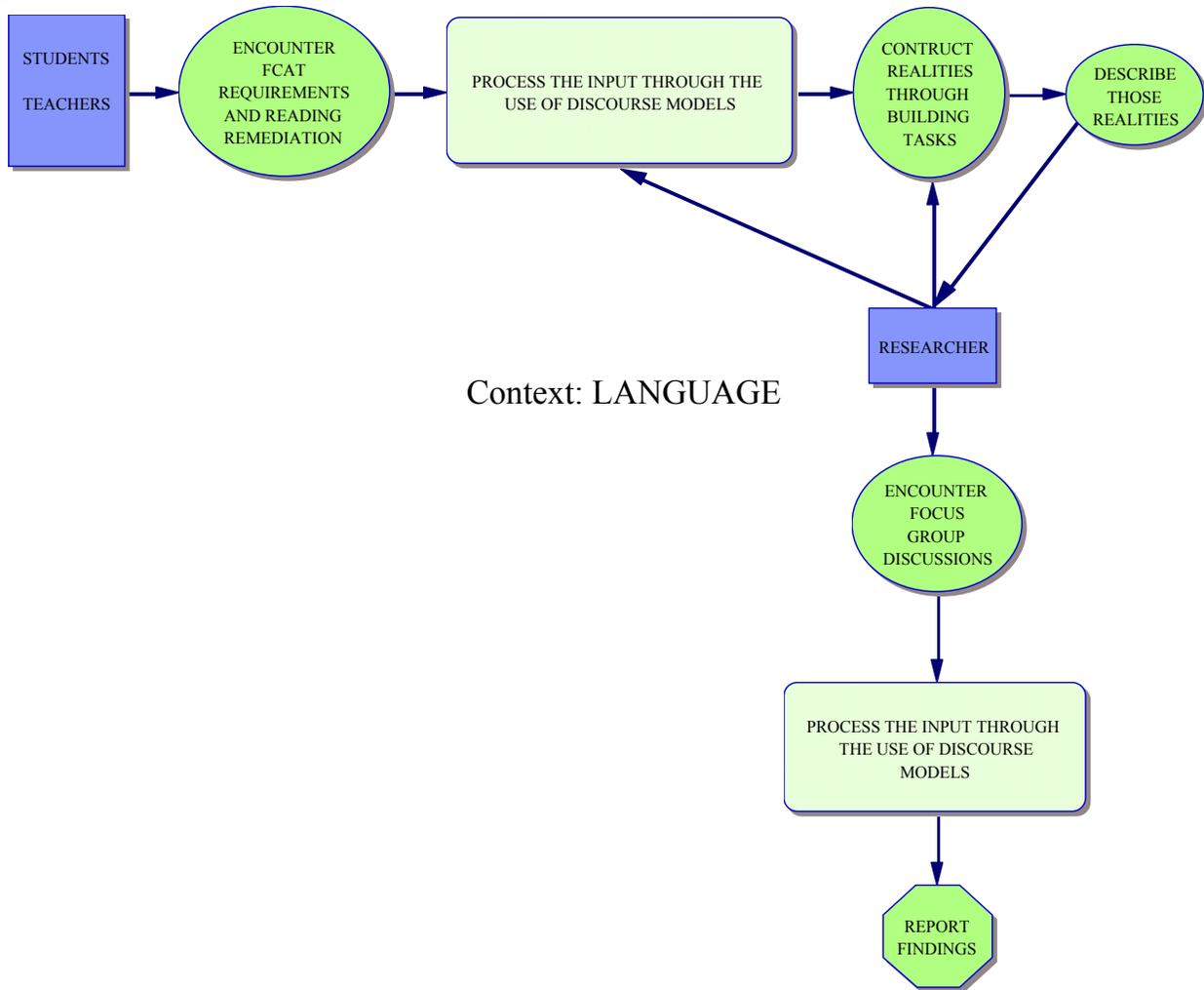
1. Please tell us who you are and name your favorite character from a book or movie.
2. What is your opinion about how your teachers have helped you with your reading in high school?
3. Think back to a situation when one of your high school teachers helped you improve your reading. Describe it.
4. What other ways have your high school teachers tried to help you with your reading?

5. What types of teacher assistance have been the most helpful to you?
6. If you were in charge of how teachers help students with reading here at the high school, what changes would you make?
7. What do you think have been the most important points made during this discussion?
8. Would anyone like to say anything more about how teachers have helped you with your reading?

Negotiation of Assessment (Round 3, Thursday, March 16)

1. Please tell us who you are and whether you would rather read about real people and situations or fictional characters and situations.
2. What is your opinion about how you have been tested on your reading ability in high school, both in class and by the FCAT?
3. Describe the ways you have been tested on your reading ability in high school.
4. What types of tests do you think paint the most accurate picture of how well you can read?
5. What types of tests do you think are the most helpful to you? How?
6. If you were in charge of how students are tested on their reading ability in high school, what changes would you make?
7. What do you think have been the most important points made during this discussion?
8. Would anyone like to say anything more about how you have been tested on your reading ability in high school?
9. What is your opinion about how reading is taught in high school?
(the same question asked at the beginning of the first discussion)

APPENDIX B
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Craig A. Davis was born in St. Augustine, Florida. He earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of North Florida (UNF) and then moved to nearby Palatka after accepting a teaching position at Palatka High School (PHS). He taught English at PHS for four years, during which, he earned a master's degree in Educational Leadership from UNF. He is currently employed by Duval County Public Schools as an assistant principal at Lake Shore Middle School in Jacksonville, Florida.