Fall 12-14-2023

"I Forget to Enjoy the Book": A Narrative Analysis of Adolescents' Perceptions of Their Real Selves and Ideal Selves as Readers

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"I Forget to Enjoy the Book": A Narrative Analysis of Adolescents' Perceptions of Their

Real Selves and Ideal Selves as Readers

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Secondary and Middle Grades Education

Kennesaw State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Education

December 2023

Kennesaw State University

Abstract

In the present study, the researcher sought to understand student perceptions of themselves as readers compared to their ideal selves as readers. This is in response to personal experience with struggling readers, as well as GADOE data showing the magnitude of the issue surrounding struggling readers at Mountain Middle School (MMS). The data collected included student drawings and accompanying interviews. Findings revealed that students placed their perceptions of self within specific classroom situations and settings, which reveals the complexity and contextual nature of perception of self as a reader. Though individual stories and experiences were unique, six major themes emerged across all narratives, including reading as an (inter)personal experience, perceived roadblocks to reading achievement and enjoyment, social comparisons of reading, student ideal selves and perfect worlds, change of reading enjoyment over time, and motivation increased with texts that participants personally deemed interesting. This study sheds light on the importance of knowing who students are as readers on a deeper level so that we can understand the contextual and self-directed aspects that shape our students' perceptions of self.

Keywords: self-perception, self-concept, struggling readers, image-based research, narrative research, humanistic theory, expectancy-value theory

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank my outstanding committee chair, Dr. Gaines, without whom I would not have made it this far. I could never thank you enough for your support and guidance throughout this journey. I am forever grateful that we found each other just in time and for your dedication throughout this process. You provided structure, actionable feedback, and regular check ins, which allowed me to ask my thousands of questions (that you graciously answered thoroughly and kindly each and every time.) You kept me encouraged in the trenches of the most stressful pieces of this journey, and you authentically celebrated with me each and every milestone. Thank you again for everything! I am so fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from you!

To my committee—thank you both! Dr. Crovitz, having your narrative insight and expertise was invaluable. You shared resources and pushed me to think about narrative inquiry in ways I had not considered, which I believe directly contributed to chapters four and five being so much fun to write! Dr. Vasquez, thank you for your kindness and encouragement throughout. Your feedback was much appreciated and helped make my work stronger. I am grateful for both of you and your willingness to serve on my committee!

To the colleagues who have poured into me over the years—thank you! A special thank you to Kinser, Beth Ann, Missie, Matt, and John. I have learned from and beside each of you, and I couldn't be more grateful to be surrounded by colleagues of your caliber. I would not be the educator that I am today without you all.

To my husband, who has been a supporter of this journey from the beginning. Hours upon hours have been spent with me isolated and writing our precious evening and weekend time away, and you never complained once. Instead, you picked up extra duties and ensured I had the time and space to commit to this process. Thank you for being a source of encouragement when I needed it most, and for cheering me on every step of the way. I'm grateful to have you by my side for this journey and beyond!

To my family, my original support system and my biggest cheerleaders. First to my dad, who has shown me over and over what hard work and dedication look like, who taught me the value of doing the right thing, and who is my forever hero. To my sister, who is my permanent best friend and who ensured that I never gave up. I can't thank you enough for all that you've done (big and small) along the way to keep me focused and moving in the right direction, even if it sometimes just included a little break to go thrift shopping and laugh all morning. It may not seem like much, but it was just what I needed to refresh my mind and soul! To my mom who is always a phone call away and the first to congratulate my milestones. Thank you for instilling my love of teaching as a child and always supporting my goals and dreams! To the rest of my family, I could write pages upon pages about how thankful I am for all of you! And good news—I'll finally be able to attend the Sunday cookouts!

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the participants in my study, who told their stories with incredible thoughtfulness, honesty, and courage. Your voices are important and deserve to be heard. You are all incredibly unique, talented young adults, and your stories inspire me to be the best educator I can be. Thank you for sharing your experiences and trusting me with your stories.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"I haven't read a whole book since fourth grade!" - Daniel

It's late August, and our literacy class is transitioning from the period of ice breakers and getting-to-know-you activities to our first book club of the year. During the first meeting for one group, a student boasts proudly about his "achievement." Daniel is a Hispanic eighth grade student whose reputation precedes him. Neither of his older siblings made it through eighth grade before being permanently expelled to alternative school, which is also where Daniel finished seventh grade. He chose to read *The Hunger Games* for his book club, and today was the check-in for the first few pages. Not only had he not completed the reading on the book that he selected, but he didn't plan to do so.

I thought about what he said about having not finished a book since fourth grade. This in mind, I offered him the option of choosing another book that wasn't on the original list I had provided.

"Oh, come on," I say, "There has to be *one* book that you've enjoyed in the past."

"Nah, I hate to read."

Though I've had many students in the past who have "forgotten" to read or had an excuse as to why they couldn't finish their reading, this was the first time that I had encountered a student who appeared *proud* that he didn't read. I knew my only chance was to find a book to which he could relate.

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Fast forward a few weeks, and I receive a message from Daniel on Canvas, our digital learning platform: "Ey, im in ISS. Wats my work for today?"

"Good morning, Daniel," I reply. "I want you to check out this book. The first chapter is available at the following link … let me know if you like it. If so, I'll send the whole book down and you can read it."

After fifteen minutes, I receive a reply: "Send it down plz."

Statement of the Problem

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2022), students are expected to learn and demonstrate proficiency in the English language arts (ELA) classroom through five distinct categories: reading literary texts, reading informational texts, writing, language, and speaking and listening. The eighth-grade standards ask students to engage in tasks such as:

- Determine a theme and/or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

- Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

- Write arguments to support claim(s) using logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

- Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

However, assessment data and reading research indicate that large proportions of students struggle to complete these types of reading tasks successfully (Georgia Dept. Of Education, 2022; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022).

Several factors contribute to understanding issues surrounding struggling readers. From a psychological standpoint, there is the complex issue of motivation. According to Daniels et al. (2011), "Motivation or lack thereof is a primary issue in young adolescents' learning and achievement in school" (p. 2). While reading motivation is highest in the early years of elementary school, by middle school, motivation decreases substantially for many students due to a variety of in- and out-of-school issues (Malaspina & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008).

In terms of motivation to read, specifically, when students enter middle school, their desire to read often begins to decrease (Lepper et. al, 2005), resulting in *aliteracy*, or when students who *can* read choose not to (Beers, 1996). Beers states, "Whether you call them nonreaders, literate nonreaders, reluctant readers, or alliterate, the group of young people who can read but do not is large and growing" (p. 2). Although it isn't strictly limited to particular areas, ethnic groups, or ability levels, the increased prevalence of aliteracy among English language learners (ELL) and students with exceptional learning needs (ESS) has been attributed to these students' lack of perceived reading competence and negative perceptions of themselves as readers (Miyamoto et al., 2018). The field of education research provides us with valuable

insight into what connections can be made among student perceptions of themselves as readers and reading achievement, as well as evidence of the dramatic effect that teachers' perceptions of students can have on student learning and achievement (Flint et al., 2014). Timmermans et al. (2015) found that teacher perceptions can affect their expectations for students. Johnson et al. (2021) found that "students experience high teachers' expectations as instilling confidence in their ability as learners" (p. 1,547). Similarly, Hornstra et al. (2018) found that "teacher expectations were moderately but positively associated with students' intrinsic motivation and engagement, and negatively with amotivation" (p. 1).

Despite resounding evidence that students' self-perceptions affect their academic behavior and outcomes, less is known about the (mis)alignment between students' perceptions of themselves as readers and their ideas about the type of reader they want to be. To address this gap in the literature, I conducted a qualitative narrative study to understand student perceptions of themselves as readers. Specifically, drawing on Rogers' (1961) humanistic theory and concept of actual and ideal selves, I collected drawing by and accompanying interviews with struggling readers to capture their lived experiences and how these experiences inform their perceived actual and ideal selves as readers. By gaining student perspectives on these co-existing self-perceptions and their experiences with literacy, this study addressed this gap and provides data to foster conversation about how to differentiate reading instruction (and interventions) and increase the potential relevance and utility of reading.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do middle school students who struggle with reading perceive themselves as readers and how do they represent these perceptions visually?

- What differences exist between struggling readers' actual and ideal selves?

- How do students story their experiences as readers, and how do these stories relate to their self-perceptions?

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how struggling adolescent readers' story their experiences with reading, and how these narratives relate to or inform their perceptions of themselves as readers in actuality and as an ideal. By collecting perspectives of struggling readers specifically, and collecting these perspectives through drawings and interviews - means that do not require them to engage in reading or writing itself - a conversation can emerge about the types of experiences that lead struggling readers to develop amotivating self-perceptions; and therefore how educators can create experiences that may address these perceptions to help increase student reading motivation, enjoyment, and ultimately, achievement.

The issues surrounding struggling readers are complex and important. As a teacher and researcher, I aimed to gather data directly from the most involved parties in this issue—the students who struggle with reading. By asking struggling readers to create and explain a visual representation of themselves as readers, and then to reflect on, explain, and expand on those drawings in subsequent interviews, I got a peek into the reality of those closest to this issue. Specifically, students were asked to draw representations of how they perceive themselves as readers, including their actual and ideal selves (Rogers, 1961); and participate in a short

interview to describe their drawings. These sources offer a unique combination of data that provided important insight into the beliefs held by students (and the stories behind those beliefs) that they may struggle to express verbally or in writing. The drawings, by allowing students to describe their relationship to reading through image and metaphor, allowed them to make their perceptions visible and concrete (Prosser & Bourke, 2008). The interview component offered more insight into students' perceptions by allowing students to reflect on, explain, and react to their drawings. This information is important to launching larger conversations about next steps in motivating struggling readers. Understanding how students perceive themselves as readers and how their prior experiences with reading shape those perceptions will enable educators to differentiate instruction (and interventions) and increase the potential relevance and utility of reading.

There has been a growing concern with students' lack of reading motivation for decades (Beers, 1998), and understanding how students perceive themselves (and how those perceptions relate to their reading and learning experiences) allows teachers and researchers to understand the mindset from which they're working. In the reading classroom specifically, an external behavior may be a lack of participation or even a verbal, "I hate reading." To understand student reading perceptions of themselves as readers is to begin to understand the beliefs behind these actions. In addition, this research aims to inform the practice of English teachers, and perhaps other contents as well, who may want to move beyond assumptions about why students are lacking motivation and seek to ask students directly.

I sought to gain insight into student perceptions of themselves as readers through drawings (with similar methodology to McHatton et al., 2014). Visual data has been suggested as a powerful source to explore and reveal student perceptions in education (Bessette, 2008; Haney et al., 2004; McHatton et al., 2014). Prosser and Bourke (2008) explain that one reason for this is that students of all ability levels are able to lend their voice in an equitable way. This helps students who may have verbal processing disorders or low reading or vocabulary skills to still have their voices heard. Prosser and Bourke go on to discuss how drawings with accompanying narratives can provide acknowledgement for students that their experiences matter and are important. Image-based research has quickly gained momentum in the field of education in recent years as a viable tool to gain access to student perception on a variety of educational topics, including classroom community (Farmer et al. 2016), learning environment (McHatton et al. 2014), "good" readers (Cobb, 2012), students' help-seeking behavior (Beisler & Medaille, 2016), co-teaching Habits (Bessette, 2008), testing (Karasahinoglu and Kutlu, 2018), and reading engagement (Pflaum and Bishop, 2004). Students are critical stakeholders in their own education, and it is critical that we include their voices in our research. Using image-based research allows us to move toward a more inclusive field of study that incorporates voices from students of all ability levels (McHatton et al., 2014).

Local Context

This study was conducted at Mountain Middle School (MMS; pseudonym) in Georgia. The school has a wide number of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, religion, and cultures. The school serves approximately 1,200 students, 70% of whom are

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Latinx/Hispanic, 19% White/European American, 5% Black/African American, 2% Asian/Asian American, and 3% multiple or other ethnicities. More than 80% of students are considered economically disadvantaged and 11% have disabilities. Almost 30% of students are English Learners (EL), some of whom attend the school's language academy, in which beginning ELs are given additional English language support before being put into the mainstream classroom.

Figure 1

Demographic Breakdown of Mountain Middle School (MMS)
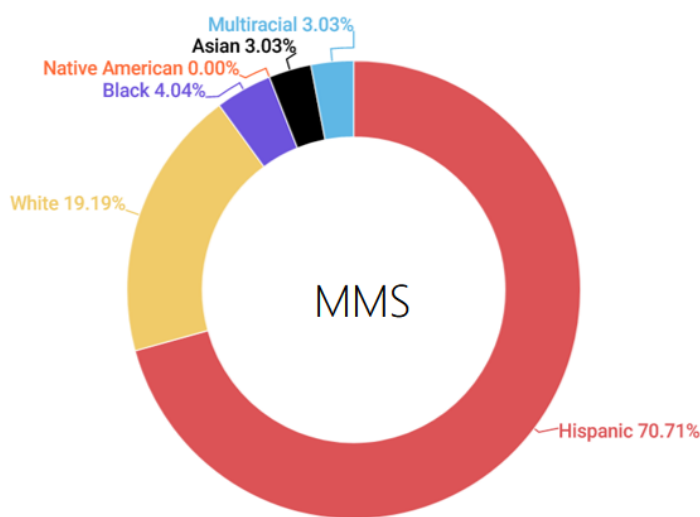
In all, MMS has 15 English teachers (including co-teachers), two academic coaches (one specific to ELA), two special services coaches (one for ESS and one for ELL), and two interventionists (one for ELA). The literacy department has access to a book room with books that are leveled and separated by genre. This is in addition to the class sets available in the library. This resource is intended to help teachers differentiate for students by reading levels and

interest. Though MMS teachers do not use a prescribed curriculum, they co-design and pace their units collaboratively using the workshop model as their framework.

Background and Role of the Researcher

As a young educator, one of the first issues to grab my attention was struggling readers. This was not just an issue in my class; it was a school-wide issue. Students were coming into middle school years below grade level, and I began to dive into the issue further. I quickly learned that some students had low reading scores because of a learning disability. However, there were many who did not have a disability but were still struggling. These students were often labeled behavior problems and received punishment, whereas students with disabilities received services.

Daniel, the student at the center of this chapter's opening vignette, is just one example of a student who had no disabilities, yet he struggled in literacy class. Despite Daniel's initial assertions that he simply did not read, and hadn't read a book in years, I was able to get him interested in reading by offering a text that, perhaps, reflected characters and situations that were more personally relevant to Daniel. Specifically, the book that Daniel read is about a boy who is living in an urban neighborhood, trying to survive and keep his little brother out of foster care. The language and content are more oriented to high school than middle school students, but this is partly the reason Daniel found it so interesting. That, and the fact that he called the protagonist "real."

This is a success story because not only did Daniel read the first book in the series, but he also read the second one. Daniel offers a powerful example of how students' understandings of

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themselves and their relationships to books may help teachers engage otherwise "alliterate" students in reading. Though many educators would see Daniel's family background and socioeconomic status through a deficit lens (i.e., as reasons for his lack of motivation and low reading proficiency, and therefore something to be overcome), when it was framed as an asset and an important source of prior knowledge and experiences, it could be leveraged in order to select a text that was relevant and interesting to him, such that he was able to demonstrate above grade-level reading proficiency. When framed in terms of how he understands himself as a reader, Daniel's day-to-day circumstances become pivotal experiences, such that he now engaged in reading voluntarily and could demonstrate proficiency in a multitude of ELA standards.

Because of the countless encounters I've experienced with low-reading motivation among students, I used qualitative narrative research to gather student perceptions of themselves as readers. It was my intent to go beyond reading motivation theory and gather data from the students themselves. My main objective was to further understand how they view themselves as readers as well as how they wish to perceive themselves as readers; and to then have the larger discussion of how to continue to improve students' reading experiences and increase reading motivation for aliterate students like Daniel.

Worldview

As a constructivist, I believe that reality, knowledge, and truth are constructed through individual experience. Specifically, students construct knowledge based on their past experiences, background, and prior knowledge that they bring to their learning environment. As

a middle school educator, my students are just beginning to find their own voice and learn about authentic world issues. Students are provided opportunities to construct knowledge of these issues through texts, research, and book clubs. Additionally, students engage in writing assignments that encourage students to explore their identity and what makes them unique. This is the identity and perspective that students bring to classroom conversations. Additionally, the power of a strong learning community where students can be social and learn from each other, as well as from the teacher, cannot be understated.

The present study is situated within a constructivist worldview and seeks to gain insight into relationships between students' reading motivation and perceptions of themselves as readers, as well as their stories of formative experiences with reading. Specifically, the researcher seeks to understand the perspectives of struggling readers within the specific context of MMS, where the study is taking place. How the students view themselves as readers within the reading classroom, where they spend 12 years of their lives, was studied. Creswell (2007) states, "In [a constructivist] worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work…The researcher's intent, then, is to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world" (p. 8). There is much value in understanding the perspectives of our students. In this way, teachers can gain a unique perspective when considering best teaching practices and what works for our students.

My main theoretical framework, Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, is situated within this constructivist worldview (Herman, 1995). Specifically, both constructivism and humanistic theory focus on "learning processes and mental conceptualizations of meaningful learning"

(Herman, 1995, p. 12). This overlap is of particular importance because it focuses on the learning process rather than product. It puts the students in the active learning role, while the teacher facilitates, and most importantly, actively listens to the students. This study is designed to gather student perspectives, thus being what Rogers (1969) calls "person-centered." The other major overlap between constructivism and Humanistic theory is the importance of student-teacher relationships (Herman, 1995). In both, it is a critical factor in the learning and personal growth process. Rogers (1980) proposes that being situated in a safe environment promotes personal growth and meaningful learning. As such, struggling readers' stories about their experiences with reading in school may help us understand how they come to perceive themselves as readers and engaging in reading.

Methodology

The methodology for this study was a qualitative narrative design. This methodology was rooted in my constructivist worldview and Rogers' (1969) Humanistic theory of Human Development, which is the primary theoretical framework undergirding the study. Specifically, according to Rogers, the idea of self can be broken into two parts: the ideal self and the real self. The *ideal self* is who we want to be, which would include all our goals and dreams; whereas our *real self* is who we are now. The more closely aligned the ideal self and real self, the stronger and more accurate one's self concept becomes. Conversely, major differences in the ideal and real self can cause issues with self-esteem. In the reading classroom, this can cause students to have low self-esteem regarding their ability to be successful with reading tasks.

Research Methods

To gather insights into the students' perceptions of self as readers and how these perceptions are connected to their past experiences with reading, research methods involved collecting and analyzing drawings of their actual and ideal selves as readers and accompanying interviews. Drawings specifically were selected to give students a unique outlet to express their views. Because the participants were identified struggling readers, which often includes populations who may not be able to or feel comfortable conveying themselves authentically in literacy-heavy situations, drawings were chosen as the first data source. Several researchers have found drawings to be a rich form of data that could be otherwise inaccessible due to the limitations of language itself or students' difficulties in using language to express themselves effectively (Malchiodi, 1998; Prosser & Bourke, 2008). Additionally, drawings allow students time to thoughtfully consider and revise their response before submitting.

Accompanying interviews were included as a data source to allow students to narrate their drawings and to elicit more specific narratives. As cited by Brailas (2020), "Participants' produced drawings can be used to elicit further verbal data, by asking participants to reflect on what they have drawn" (p. 4448). In the current study, this component offered more literal insight into students' perceptions and experiences and can be used to explain and elaborate on their more abstract and metaphorical illustrations.

Definition of Relevant Terms

- **Self-Perception:** "[A] person's view of his or herself or of any of the mental or physical attributes that constitute the self" (American Psychological Association, 2022).

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- **Self-Concept**: "... [The] totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979). This is often noted as the answer to the question "Who am I?" Psychologist Carl Rogers breaks down self-concept into three components:
  - **Self-Image**: How we see ourselves; according to psychologist Cynthia Vinney (2018), this can include both physical traits and personality traits, which can be inflated positively or negatively.
  - **Self-Esteem**: The value we place on ourselves.
  - **Ideal Self**: Who we want to be, including our dreams and goals.
- **Self-Efficacy**: The belief (or disbelief) that one will be successful on a given task; often specific to domains, tasks, and beliefs about how an individual will perform on context-specific tasks in specified domains, such as comprehending an editorial on immigration as part of an English exam (Unrau et al., 2018)
- **Aliterate**: Having the ability to read, but choosing not to do so (Beers, 1998)
- **Image-based Research**: The use of a wide range of visuals (e.g., film, video, photographs, cartoons) within a qualitative research context (Prosser, 2008).
- **Struggling Readers**: Students who scored below 20% percentile on winter MAP Reading assessment.

Limitations and Delimitations

Though much consideration was given to the methodology and methods of this study, there are still limitations to be considered. To begin with, student drawings can sometimes be

mis-analyzed since it requires a level of assumption when coding. To address this limitation, the researcher included accompanying interviews so that students could help tell their own story and assist the researcher in the validity of the analysis.

In terms of delimitations, only a portion of struggling readers in our school were participants in this study. Due to the size of our school (roughly 1,200 students), it was not feasible to gather this type of data for all students at once. However, this study could be repeated to get a larger sample size and a clearer picture of student perceptions of themselves as readers as a school.

Chapter Summary

The demands on students in the ELA classroom are rigorous and challenging. Thus, teachers have high expectations for their students and want them to perform well. This is including achievement for those who are identified as struggling readers, as teachers often spend much of their time and energy trying to help these students have mastery experiences and perform at grade level. This study aimed to gain insight from those most directly involved in this issue—the students. Using image-based research and accompanying interviews, the researcher had students express their perceptions of real self and their perception of their ideal self (Rogers, 1961) to understand their lived experiences, as well as situate understandings within my theoretical framework, role as a researcher, and the context of my study.

Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provided in this paper outlines the theories and concepts from relevant literature through which I understood student perceptions of reading. Using a qualitative approach, I sought to gain insight into student perceptions of themselves as readers and how those perceptions informed and were informed by students' stories about their experiences with reading. By gathering data directly from the students, I aimed to make meaning of the lived experiences of students in the reading/ELA classroom. As the main stakeholders of their own education, students can provide valuable insight into issues that teachers and researchers do not have access to otherwise.

To gain a foundational knowledge before beginning the study, a theoretical framework was developed, and a review of relevant literature was conducted. This chapter begins with an overview of the major theories on which the study is based, including Carl Rogers' Humanistic theory of Human Development and expectancy value theory (EVT) of motivation. EVT (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992) provides a valuable structure that explain relationships between students' perceptions of themselves and the content or skills they are supposed to learn in both intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts. Additionally, a review of topical research on reading self-perception, including factors that affect and are affected by self-perception, is provided as context for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

Humanistic theory of Human Development

Psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) asserts that people can become their ideal selves when they are in an environment that is warm, safe, and accepting. Building on the work of Maslow, Rogers' work focuses on how people can become their best selves. One major component of his humanistic theory is that for people to reach self-actualization, their real self and ideal self would be the same. This is when people reach their complete potential in life.

As a psychologist, he asserts that one major component of helping people reach their potential is by building trusting relationships where they feel free to be their authentic selves. Rogers (1961) hypothesizes that this important relationship could span well beyond psychology. Specifically, in terms of education, he states, "If the teacher creates such a relationship with his class, the student will become a self-initiated learner, more original, more self-disciplined, less anxious, and other-directed" (p. 20). Rogers goes on to say that when this relationship is created, people begin to drop the "mask" or the false front that they are putting on in a public place. In this way, authentic conversations can be focused on the individual seeking growth (e.g., patients, students).

Self-Concept. From a psychological standpoint, Rogers (1961) says that clients come to him with many problems, yet the root of them all can be summed up by the question "Who am I, really? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all of my surface behavior? How can I become myself?" (p. 23). According to Rogers (1969), the idea of self can be broken into the ideal self and the real self. The *ideal self* is who we want to be, which would include all of

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our goals and dreams; whereas our *real self* is who we perceive ourselves to be now. The more closely aligned the ideal self and real self, the stronger and more accurate one's self concept becomes.

Rogers asserts that self-concept can be broken into three categories: self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self. When there are discrepancies between *self-image* (i.e., perception of real self) and the ideal self, it can create an issue in one's self-esteem. In the field of education, and reading specifically, this could be applied to a student who wants to be a strong reader (i.e., ideal self) but has a low self-image (i.e., real self) due to various prior experiences. This, in turn, could cause self-esteem issues that could affect their motivation to read and/or their ability to be a successful reader.

Relation to this Study. Using humanistic theory as a theoretical foundation, the researcher aimed to gain insight into students' perceptions of their real and ideal selves specifically in terms of reading, and to collect stories that aid in understanding the origins and impact of their self-perceptions. To understand the perceptions of the real self would be to understand what underlies the external, surface behavior. Herman (1995) states that the Humanistic theory "respects the human dignity and uniqueness of the individual, promotes personal freedom of choice with responsibility for actions, and depicts motivation being optimal when learners perceive personal meaning in learning" (p. 9). Using drawings and interviews, the sought to understand the perspective of those who are the most directly affected by the conversation of student motivation: the students.

Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) refers to the understanding "that individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on [a given] activity and the extent to which they value it" (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 68). Atkinson (1957) was the first to create a mathematical expectancy-value model to attempt to explain behavior and motivation in terms of academic achievement. In terms of expectancy, Atkinson rated the probability of an individual's expected success on a task on a scale of 0 to 1. He stated that the incentive value is the attractiveness of succeeding on an achievement task. Eccles et al.'s (1983) expectancy-value model built on Atkinson's earlier work, but the terms of both *expectancy* and *value* are both broadened. *Expectancies*, in this model, are defined as the beliefs that students have on how well they will do on an upcoming task. *Values*, however, refer to an individual's desire to complete a task. These values are subjective and vary among individuals, so while two students may have identical expectancies for success on a reading task, one may put a high value on reading while the other may find little or no value in the task. In this situation, despite their similar expectancies, the former would be more motivated on the task.

Eccles et al. (1983) also describe value as falling into four general categories:

1. *Attainment value*: The personal level of importance placed on completing a task well.

2. *Intrinsic value*: Inherent enjoyment of completing a task.

3. *Utility value*: How useful a task is and how well that task fits into an individual's future plans (for example, taking a specific English course in order to graduate).

4. *Cost*: What the individual must give up in order to complete the task (for example, social

    time with friends).

When considering the four value types, attainment value has the most connection to one's

identity; if a person assigns attainment value to a task, it aligns with and reinforces who they are

as a person. Intrinsic value centers around tasks that one would enjoy, and therefore also relates

to identity. For example, tasks are more intrinsically valuable when then are personally relevant.

When considering utility value, one must consider how beneficial the task would be, which could

include how well it fits into future plans. Cost, which is categorized under value, is almost

antithetical to the types of values previously described in so far as it is demotivating.

Specifically, it causes students to weigh what they must give up in order to complete the task. It

may be that other tasks take priority, thus lessening motivation for the task at hand.

Wigfield et al. (2009) explain that both an individual's values and expectancies are

influenced by task-specific perceptions and experiences. "These beliefs, goals, and affective

memories are influenced by individuals' perceptions of other people's attitudes and expectations

of them, and by their own interpretations of their previous achievement outcomes" (p. 56). As

such, it seems likely that students who have developed perceptions of themselves as "readers," or

believe that others perceive them to be strong readers may make more positive expectancies and

place greater value on reading tasks, resulting in greater motivation to read. Conversely, students

who do not have strong personal connections to reading and/or believe that others perceive them

to be poor readers may be likely to have negative expectancy beliefs and focus on the cost of

reading as opposed to the value.

The importance of cost for such students aligns with recent calls from some EV theorists to move toward an expectancy-value-cost model (Anderman & Dawson, 2016; Barron & Hulleman, 2014), which would change cost from a category of value to one of the major constructs driving motivation. Along these lines, cost would have its own subset of specific components: task effort, other effort, loss of valued alternatives, and negative psychological experiences with failure (Anderman & Dawson, 2016). Barron and Hulleman (2014) point out that a student can have both pieces of the current EV model (i.e., high expectancy for success and high task value), but still lack motivation due to the cost of the task. In one example, they describe a student who was highly involved in extracurricular activities and struggled with motivation because the cost (i.e., time to study) was too high.

Expectancy-Value Theory in the Reading Classroom. In the reading classroom, a mixture of students' expectancies of success, perceived value of tasks, and potential costs create a diverse group of academic behaviors and motivations. Griffin et. al (2020) used EVT to conceptualize reading attitudes and reading self-concepts. Their findings included a strong correlation between English Language Learners' reading self-concept and attitudes toward reading (p. 19). Cantrell et. al (2018) also used EVT to investigate "how motivational variables predicted changes in reading behavior and achievement across the transition [from middle to high school] in terms of [students'] expectancies, values, and out-of-school reading behaviors" (p. 1). Their findings included a significant increase in intrinsic value of reading from the end of grade 8 to the end of grade 9, but a significant decrease in attainment value in the same time frame. Additionally, they found that:

students' perceived utility value interacted with intrinsic value in predicting Grade 9

reading comprehension scores...Although intrinsic value was associated with increases in

comprehension scores for all students, this effect was stronger for those who also

reported higher levels of perceived utility value (p. 7).

Together, these studies show the value of understanding student perceptions and how they are

shaped by their experiences to further understand classroom reading behaviors.

Relatedly, to understand how reading motivation affected student course selections,

Simmons et al. (2022) gave students an expectancy value questionnaire that they adapted from

Eccles and Wigfield's (1995) *Self- and Task-Perception Questionnaire* (*STPQ*). On the adapted

version (in which math questions were switched to language arts and additional questions were

added to reflect cost-task value and expectancies), students ranked high on the motivation scale;

however, value varied, with attainment being the highest-ranking value and cost being the lowest

among 9th grade students. Overall, they found a correlation between high E-V scores and

selection of advanced courses. Similarly, Bergey et al. (2018) found that "students with a self-

reported history of reading difficulty described lower academic self-efficacy, earned lower

grades, and accrued fewer credits" (p. 1). Other aspects found to increase reading motivation

through the lens of expectancy value are parent-involvement (Klauda, 2009) and reading for

pleasure (Kirchner, 2018).

Review of Relevant Literature

A literature review was conducted and informed the context of the study. By

understanding the existing body of research, the researcher could frame the study among current

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studies, as well as identify gaps to ensure relevancy of the current study. The research outlined in this chapter offer valuable insight into student self-perceptions in reference to reading, factors affecting student self-perception in the reading classroom, and self-concept and self-efficacy, also related to the reading classroom.

Self-Perception and Reading

There is a growing body of research that aims to understand the relationship between student self-perception and academic achievement. This continues to be true in the field of reading (Fälth et al., 2014; Hogsten & Peregoy, 1999; Lynch, 2000; Pershey, 2011), with Lynch (2002) explicitly stating that "Children's self-perceptions as readers [are] significantly related to their reading achievement" (p. 54). While the ways self-perception has been defined and operationalized vary from study to study within this field (i.e., self-efficacy, self-image, self-concept), cross-cutting themes offer insight into the relationship between reading self-perception, reading achievement, and reading motivation. Specifically, researchers have found positive correlations between student reading self-perception and achievement. For example, Pershey (2011) found that students who reported high levels of self-efficacy scored higher on standardized testing than did those who reported low levels of self-efficacy. Similarly, Hogsten and Peregoy (1999) found that "below grade level readers scored more negatively on all [content self-efficacy] scales than on grade level readers" (p. 3). This also means that students who were on or above grade-level scored higher on the self-efficacy scales than did those below. Similar results were reported by Fälth et al. (2014), even though they framed self-perception in terms of self-image as opposed to self-efficacy. Specifically, they found a lower self-image among

students who had reading disabilities; and of those students, those who had low self-image also showed less improvement than those with a typical self-image, specifically in word decoding and reading comprehension (p. 30). Taken together, these studies indicate the important relationship between self-perception and reading achievement.

Factors in Reading Self-Perception. Research has also investigated the factors that shape or influence students' perceptions of themselves as readers, such as interest. For example, Walgermoa et al., (2018) studied 1,171 five- and six-year-old readers to understand the relationship between their self-concept and interest at the very beginning of formal reading instruction. Using an age-appropriate test, the researchers found that high reading interest was a major contributor to positive reading self-concept, even if emergent reading skills were low.

However, most of the research on factors contributing to reading self-perception focuses on reading ability and the acquisition (or lack) of foundational reading skills. For example, studies have found that self-perceptions as readers are related to the tendency to exhibit learning difficulties; however, the same studies also report that there is no statistical link between student self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension (Carroll & Fox, 2016; Howes et al., 1997). Still, research has noted that reading skills, such as word-reading, are positively linked with students' self-perceptions as readers. Kasperski et al. (2016) supports the idea of individual reading skills being correlated with student reading self-concept, as their study found that reading rate and rapid naming are predictors of self-concept. Kwon and Linderholm's (2015) findings support the notion that there is a connection between reading self-perception and reading speed/skill as well. Specifically, they found that:

1. Self-perceived reading speed strongly correlated with self-perceived reading skill, whereas the correlation between actual reading speed and actual reading skill was low.

2. Self-perception of reading speed significantly predicted self-perception of reading skill after controlling for actual reading skill.

3. How highly correlated reading skill was with self-perceived reading speed was found to affect how accurately one perceived his or her reading skill.

Essentially, this study asserts that student perceptions of their reading speed will affect their perception of their reading skill because students see reading speed as a measure of how well they read overall. These findings are particularly interesting considering the relationship between reading speed and reading self-concept (Kasperski et al., 2016), and suggest that reading perception is closely related to individual skills, such as reading speed.

   Gender and Age Differences in Reading Self-Perception. Regarding students' perception of themselves as readers, gender differences have been studied and, in some cases, found to be statistically significant. In their study of 556 fourth-grade students, Sagirli and Okur (2017) found that female students have more positive reader self-perceptions than male students. Similar findings were reported by Lynch (2002), who studied 66 students and 92 parents' self-efficacy beliefs. Lynch found higher reading self-efficacy in females over males. She also noted that mothers had higher self-efficacy than fathers in helping their children with reading at home. On the other hand, Carroll and Fox (2017) found no statistical difference between male and female readers in terms of reading self-efficacy in their study of 179 readers aged 8-11 years old. Though the research findings are not consistent throughout the literature, this research is

significant because it suggests that in certain cases, gender roles have appeared to relate to student reading self-efficacy, which is a critically important form of self-perception.

Another research trend in student reading self-efficacy is to question whether self-efficacy increases, decreases, or stays the same as students get older. For example, Hogsten and Peregoy (1999) found that sixth grade students (N = 71) reported lower self-efficacy than did second-grade students (N= 84). This measurement was for reading, but also included the subjects of mathematics and science. The results were the same for all subjects, with sixth graders reporting lower self-efficacy than second graders. However, there are noteworthy limitations to their methodology that must be considered when applying these findings. Not only was their sample relatively small, but they compared between different groups of students in two different grades (i.e., different school and classroom contexts) as opposed to sampling the same group of students over time as they advanced from one grade to the next, which would have provided more definitive evidence about how self-efficacy changes as students age. Still, these findings do demonstrate a clear difference between groups' reading self-perceptions according to age/grade level.

Self-Concept and Self-Efficacy

As previously mentioned, there are various ways to define and operationalize self-perception based on several related but distinct constructs including (but not limited to) self-concept and self-efficacy. Though similarities exist between the constructs of self-concept and self-efficacy, such as the perception of competence, multidimensionality, and the prediction of

motivation, emotion, and performance (Bong & Einar, 2003), there are distinctive differences between the two. According to Unrau et al. (2018),

> Self-concept refers to an individual's collective self-perceptions, whereas self-efficacy is more specific to domains, tasks, and beliefs about how an individual will perform on context-specific tasks in specified domains, such as comprehending an editorial on immigration on an English exam. (p. 168)

Simply put, self-concept is a much broader perception of self. Self-efficacy, however, is more task-oriented and changes from task-to-task and across contexts. For example, a student could have high self-efficacy in a specific task in a course (e.g., a reading group discussion about a novel), but low self-efficacy in other tasks within the same course (e.g., writing a literary response). Self-concept, however, can be holistic or domain specific (e.g., mathematics, English).

Self-Concept and Reading. According to Rogers (1959), self-concept is a collective term that can be broken down into three sub-categories: self-image (how we see ourselves,) self-esteem/self-worth (how much value we place on ourselves), and ideal self (what one wishes they were like). In regard to education, the *reciprocal effects model* (*REM*), predicts a reciprocal relationship between self-concept and academic achievement (Seaton et al., 2015). For teachers, this means that prior achievement can affect the self-concept of students coming into the classroom each year. However, this also means that as students succeed, their self-concept can become increasingly positive, which can increase future achievement. Supporting this idea is

research in the field that found a positive correlation between self-concept on ability and academic achievement (Huang, 2011; Möller et al., 2009).

Figure 2

Breakdown of self-concept, according to Rogers (1959)

Self-image	• How we see ourselves
Self-esteem	• How much value we place on ourselves
Ideal self	• What one wishes he or she was like
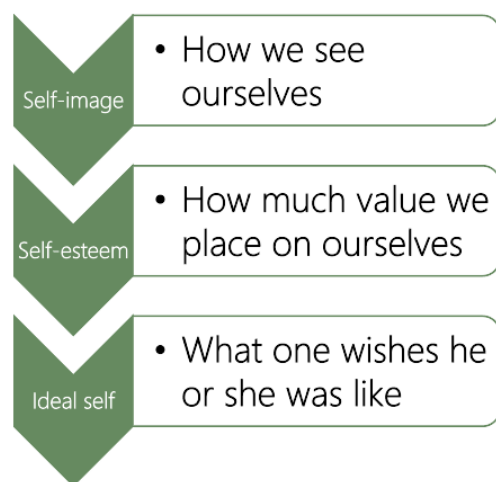
In the reading classroom, specifically, Marsh's (1986) I/E Model can be applied to understand students' academic self-concept. Marsh suggests that informing self-concept are both internal and external frames of reference. Internally, a student's reading self-concept "is related to one's perceptions of difficulties or ease associated with reading tasks and experiences" (Katzir, 2018, p. 2). Externally, factors that affect student reading self-concept include peer comparison, teacher feedback, and home factors (Katzir, 2009).

Self-Efficacy and Reading. Bandura (1997) first proposed the idea of self-efficacy and defined it as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Drawn from the larger context of social learning theory,

Bandura also believed that initiation and motivation to complete a task are linked to a person's self-efficacy. If a person has high self-efficacy, that person will likely be more motivated to begin and persevere through a task. In reading, specifically, self-efficacy can be defined as "readers' perceptions of competence in their ability to successfully complete reading tasks" (Unrau et al., 2018, p.168).

Bandura also asserts that perceptions of efficacy are based on four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, physiological and emotional states, and verbal persuasion. Unrau et al. (2018) details how these sources can be found in the reading classroom:

- *Mastery experiences*: Teaching students research-based reading strategies that enhance their comprehension and consequently lead to successful experiences (p. 169).

- *Vicarious experience*: Includes modeling reading strategies that demonstrate an approach to reading that improves efficiency and effectiveness.

- *Verbal and social persuasion*: Might include offering supportive feedback to students who demonstrate an effective application of a reading strategy.

- *Emotional and physiological states*: Could be exemplified by a struggling reader whose high levels of anxiety when asked to read aloud in class are interpreted as low confidence in completing the task successfully (p. 170).

It is no surprise that the effects of student self-efficacy can be connected to their motivation and performance in the classroom.

Empirical research in the field shows that self-efficacy is a notable and relevant topic in the reading classroom. This includes numerous studies that identify relationships between reading self-efficacy and students' reading achievement, ability, or performance. For example, Burrows (2013) found a positive correlation between student self-efficacy and gains in reading comprehension, and "that gains in reading strategy skill led to changes in reading self-efficacy" (p. v). Still others have identified connections between self-efficacy and how students engage with reading itself. McLean (2018), for example, found a significant correlation between amount of reading and reading self-efficacy (RSE) in English Language Learners. Ahmadian (2017) found that self-efficacy also plays an important role in students' use of online metacognitive reading strategies.

What all these studies have in common is the role that self-efficacy plays in multiple aspects of the reading classroom. In practical terms, this research aligns with Bandura's notion that students with high self-efficacy have more motivation to initiate and persevere through a difficult task. On the other hand, those with low self-efficacy in reading may not even bother initiating a task. However, what this research doesn't tell us is which came first: academic achievement in the classroom or the rise in self-efficacy? If self-efficacy is gained through success in the classroom, we could gather that this success gives students self-efficacy, rather than self-efficacy increasing reading skills. However, we also know that as students' efficacy increases, so does their achievement level. We could infer that this is a constant back-and-forth, like a staircase that continues to build. However, students can also move back down the steps, again depending on their experiences in the reading classroom. Understanding the types of

reading experiences that inform student self-efficacy could be a key to unlocking where student academic struggles begin before they even enter the classroom.

Summary

The theories and research outlined in this chapter provide valuable insight into what connections can be made between student self-perceptions and the reading classroom. More studies of this nature could build on the existing field of research that looks at student perceptions as a source of data. For the present study, the researcher sought to gain insight into students' perceptions of themselves as readers through drawings, specifically comparing ideal self and real self (Rogers, 1961) to capture the lived experiences and stories of students who struggle with reading. Ultimately, these findings will advance a larger conversation with teachers to address these perceptions in ways that help students become more confident readers.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The aim of this study was to examine struggling readers' real and ideal perceptions of themselves as readers, as well as the stories and experiences that have shaped and been shaped by these perceptions. Qualitative narrative research design was used to note the lived experiences of struggling readers at MMS. Specifically, by using image-based research within a narrative design, voice was given to students who may struggle to convey themselves authentically in text-based contexts, such that I gained access to their unique perspectives and lived experiences as struggling readers. In chapter 3, I describe the research design used, including narrative and image-based research, as well as methods, participants, data collection and analysis, limitations, validity and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for the present study.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do adolescent students perceive themselves as readers?
2. What differences exist between students' actual and ideal selves?
3. How do students story their experiences as readers, and how do these stories relate to their self-perceptions?

Research Design

Because student experiences as readers are the heart of this study, narrative research design was chosen to help bring their stories to light. According to Hatch (2002), narrative studies are "based on the notion that humans make sense of their lives through story" (p. 28). In

this study, student stories were constructed and revealed through drawings and accompanying interviews. As stated by Glesne (2016), "The product of good narrative research illustrates the uniqueness, dilemmas, and complexities of people in such a way that it causes readers to reflect upon themselves and bring their own situations and questions to the story" (p. 287). Students who struggle with reading are unique and have their own dilemmas and stories to share.

Narrative Research Design

Narrative research design is an example of a qualitative approach to inquiry that is more "artistic than scientific in nature," and has gained popularity over the last several decades (Barone and Eisner, 2011). Narrative inquiry aims to understand human experience, and the development and use of narrative research design is inspired by the idea that humans lead storied lives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). In this way, researchers seek to make sense of the world through the lived experience of others. Simply put, "Jerry Rosiek and I make clear that narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience. It is nothing more and nothing less" (Clandinin, 2022).

Though the provided definition seems simplistic, the range of possibilities within narrative inquiry is endless. Narrative analysis has become an umbrella term for many types of research that use stories as data, content analysis, or structure and could include analysis types such as thematic, structural, linguistic, or visual (Clandinin, 2022). A traditional narrative approach might include conversational/verbal re-telling of stories over time (Beka et al., 2023), written accounts using personal journals (Dishman and Smith, 2023), or interviews and observations over time (Yap and Gurney, 2023). However, a more innovative adaptation could

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involve a "story circle" approach, where small groups of participants (4-5) are left alone in a room with a list of story-prompting questions that are discussed among the group and recorded via audio (Parks, 2023). Additionally, Collado and Stuart (2023) present the Performative Narrative Interview (PNI) as a novel approach within narrative inquiry. The PNI "is structured as a series of sessions made up of different creative/artistic processes in which the participant, in collaboration with the researcher and visual materials made in the sessions" (p. 1425). Finally, narrative researchers could also use "creative non-fiction" (McGannon and McMahon, 2022), as well as "fiction as a means for representation of findings" (McCarthy and Stice, 2023, Kilbourn, 1999). Though the methods vary, what each of these have in common is the focus on and desire to understand lived human experiences.

Unlike traditional research methods where researchers are neutral observers who attempt to tell others' stories, narrative research design aims to allow participants to tell their own stories (Ritchie, 2013). According to McElhinney and Kennedy (2022), "Narrative research approaches provide the opportunity for constructing a detailed understanding of lived experiences" (p. 1). Though there is record of capturing oral narratives throughout history, its use in research is relatively modern. The growing interest and use of narrative research in the social sciences from the late 1980's to the early 2000's is known as the "narrative turn" (Goodson & Gill, 2011). These researchers focused on participant stories "often as a way of studying wider concepts and topics (e.g., how people cope with unemployment or illness)" (Ritchie, 2013, p. 17). As cited in Ritchie (2013), major contributors to this field include Creswell (2013), Chamberlayne et al. (2000), and Roberts (2002).

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Narrative research has grown in the fields of contemporary social sciences (Squire et al., 2014). In education, specifically, it plays an important role in revealing data that may not be accessible in other methodologies. Chan et al. (2012) state:

> Often, the idea of research is presented as orderly and linear for the purposes of conveying information and the results appear as a list of points to follow, but the lives of teacher educators and teachers and students are not so restricted or clear or certain. Rather, there can be almost a chaotic quality to those lives, which in turn, can reveal the beauty and the depth of the story and experience.

This quality of narrative research aligned well with the aim of the current study because it afforded the researcher the ability to hear the stories of students who struggle with reading, rather than crafting stories about them based on traditional data methods. Teaching reading is complex, as are adolescent students. There are many reasons why students may be struggling to read, so giving students the attention and time to tell their stories is important to understanding them as people, and not just statistics. Additionally, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state,

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p.375).

Though in this instance Clandinin and Connelly speak broadly of the human experience, the relevance to student interpretations of prior experience shaping present, daily lives cannot be ignored. Thus, teachers and researchers use narrative methods to understand student perceptions

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and experiences within the classroom, and when negative experiences have shaped self-perception, teachers are faced with the challenge of helping the student change that narrative (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000).

Narrative research was also appropriate for the current study because "narrative" is not inherently textual. Therefore, narrative research can be a powerful methodology when investigating the experiences of populations with limited literacy (Goodson, 2012), such as the struggling readers on whom I focused in this study. For example, narrative researchers can solicit participants' stories using a variety of non-text-based methods and approaches including (but not limited to) "spoken life stories, or photographic self-portraits, or day-by-day journal of events" (Squire et al., 2014, p. 7). Such methods afford all participants, particularly those who struggle with literacy, the ability to have their stories heard. This study aimed to use a narrative research design to bring forward voices and lived experiences of struggling readers as revealed through drawings and accompanying interviews. Specifically, through their drawings and interviews, students told stories about how they see themselves as readers, how they came to see themselves that way, and how they would like to see themselves as readers.

Image-Based Research

Drawings have been used historically in the field of psychology to gain insight into children's development, cognition, intelligence, emotions, and mental health (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). In 1926, Florence Goodenough developed the Draw-a-Man (DAM) Test (Jolly, 2010). This test allowed participants to use drawings to demonstrate intelligence, such as the detail in drawing the individual body parts of a person. This test has been replicated and adapted

through the decades to fit specific studies, such as Chamber's (1983) Draw-a-Scientist-Test, and it is still used in many versions today. These tests are particularly important when studying the intelligence of young children, for whom text- and language-focused forms of testing may inhibit their ability to demonstrate their actual level of understanding and/or intelligence.

Image-based research has also been used to examine other critical constructs over time and between children. For example, Lowenfeld (1947) connected children's drawings with intellectual growth:

> The knowledge that is actively at the child's disposal when he draws may then indicate his intellectual level. This knowledge changes with the chronological age of the child. Yet even in children of the same age, a great variety of active knowledge can be seen. This difference usually indicates the difference in intellectual comprehension (p. 64).

Decades later, Winnicott (1971) used drawings to tap into the emotions of children. In one example, a child drew a duck with webbed feet to illustrate his own condition (i.e., syndactyly). Winnicot noted:

> … I did not go on to explain to him that he was representing his own disability in terms of ducks. This could have been clumsy because it was extremely unlikely that he knew what he was doing or that he had any conscious intention of using a duck to represent his own disability (p. 41).

Winnicott's work speaks to the ways that image-based research, and drawing-based research specifically, can provide students an opportunity to represent their perceptions. This is a unique

advantage held by image-based research that other forms of research do not provide. However, the above excerpt also speaks to the limitations of using drawings alone to conduct narrative research. In interpreting the child's drawing, Winnicot did not allow the child to explain their drawing, voice their own experience, or shape their own narrative. Instead, Winnicot made relatively uninformed assumptions about the child's subconscious and how it may have influenced the drawing. Thus, interviews were used alongside drawings in the current study in order to elevate the student-participants' voices, experiences, and interpretations, and to give them space to reflect on and discover new meaning in their drawings.

While the field of psychology has a rich history in image-based research, only recently have image-based research methods gained momentum in the education field as a viable and innovative way to both inform and facilitate educational change (Bessette, 2008; Haney et al., 2004; McHatton et al., 2014). However, this momentum has picked up quickly, and there are several researchers who have found drawings to be a rich form of data that could be otherwise inaccessible due to the limitations of language itself or students' difficulties in using language to express themselves effectively (Malchiodi, 1998; Prosser & Bourke, 2008). Additionally, unlike interviews or standard scales/measures, which are designed to elicit one's immediate response without offering time and space for much consideration, students necessarily have time to thoughtfully consider, compose, and revise their drawings before submitting. In educational contexts, this type of opportunity may be particularly beneficial for English Language Learners, introverted students, students below grade level in reading or writing, and students with learning disabilities (Prosser & Rourke, 2008).

This approach also has many strengths that support robust data collection and trustworthiness in educational research. For one, these types of drawing tasks are quick and easy to administer and provide instant feedback for the teacher/researcher. Perhaps more importantly, however, students' drawings can provide a personal, relevant starting point for a one-to-one semi-structured interview to explore a deeper understanding; and students' responses can be recorded on the paper as they describe their images. Researchers can also have students repeat the task later so students and teacher can evaluate their personal progress.

Methods

Setting

The study took place at Mountain Middle School (MMS), specifically in the participants' literacy classrooms. As an academic coach at MMS, the researcher had the freedom to travel to the students' classroom and present the drawing tasks to the participants in an environment in which they are already comfortable.

MMS has students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, religions, and cultures. The school serves approximately 1,200 students, 70% of whom are Latinx/Hispanic, 19% White, 5% African American/Black, 2% Asian/Asian American, and 3% multiple or other ethnicities. More than 80% of students are considered economically disadvantaged and 11% have disabilities. Almost 30% of students are English Learners (EL), some of whom attend the school's language academy, in which beginning ELs are given additional English language support before entering the mainstream classroom.

Access to Site

This study was conducted at MMS during school hours. The researcher is an employee at the school, so she has access to the site. Prior to collecting data, IRB paperwork was submitted to both Kennesaw State University and the school's district office.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to ensure inclusion of participants who are considered struggling readers. In this case, *struggling readers* was operationalized as those whose MAP scores fell below the 20th percentile. Similar to McHatton et al. (2014), the researcher reached out to a teacher who taught many of these students in one class period as a potential setting for the study. Once the teacher volunteered, their students were given a permission slip (i.e., parental consent and student assent) to participate in the study. All students in that class period who returned the permission slip participated in the drawing activity, but only identified struggling readers' data was used. This expedited the data collection process without singling out those students who were selected to participate and allowed all students in the class to engage in what may be a beneficial reflective drawing exercise. Additionally, six students who were identified as struggling readers returned signed permission slips were participants in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Race	Language Profile
Gustavo	Male	Hispanic/Latino	EL (Exited)
Dylan	Male	White	Native English Speaker
Nia	Female	Multi-racial	Native English Speaker
Harrison	Male	White	Native English Speaker
Marisol	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Bilingual (English, Spanish)
Alondra	Female	Hispanic/Latino	Bilingual (English, Spanish); EL (Exited)

Note. Gustavo and Alondra had both received ESOL services but had been exited from the program and were not receiving ESOL services at the time of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Drawing Procedures. As stated previously, students completed the drawings in their literacy classroom. To avoid singling out struggling readers, all students in the class completed the drawing activity, regardless of whether they participated in the research itself. To introduce the prompt for the drawing portion (adapted from Prosser, 2008), the researcher used an intro/icebreaker derived from the *Reader Self-Perception Scale 2* (Henk et al., 2013; see Appendix B for full protocol). In Prosser's scale, before being asked any questions about reading

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specifically, students were guided through a sample question about pizza. The idea was that this gave something for all students to relate to, while also modeling how to complete the drawing exercise. Since the current study focused more on perception of self rather than an external concept (such as pizza or reading), the intro was modified to have students draw themselves completing a task. Specifically, the researcher had students quickly draw themselves playing soccer. "Imagine yourself playing soccer on the soccer field—what do you see, hear, and think?" Then, students were asked to share out and discuss their drawings. Soccer was selected as the activity for this intro specifically because students have varying experiences with and attitudes toward playing soccer. This allowed the researcher to make the point that people have different experiences, even when completing the same task. This led to the prompts for student perceptions of themselves as readers.

The drawing script for perceptions of self as reader drew on Haney et al. (2004) and McHatton et al. (2014). I adapted one prompt from their image-based research, in which they came up with 10 prompts that they used over time. Specifically, I adapted the prompt, "Think about all of the different things you do when you read. Draw a picture of what a camera would see when you are reading" (p. 41). Because I wanted students to consider something within themselves (i.e., their own perceptions of their real selves as readers and their ideal selves as readers) rather than their actions while reading, the prompt was modified into the following two prompts: (1) "When you think of yourself as a reader, what do you see, think, and feel? Draw a picture of how you see yourself as a reader"; (2) "Now imagine you have a magic wand and could create a perfect world. What kind of reader do you want to be? Draw a picture of yourself

as the reader you would be in this perfect world." Students were given 15 minutes to draw for each prompt and were provided paper, pencils, and colored pencils. At the end of the session, students were told that if they wanted additional time, they may come back the following day to complete their drawings. All students said they were finished, and no one requested additional time.

Interview Procedures. Though the entire class participated in the drawing activity, only 6 students who were identified as struggling readers (based on their MAP assessment) participated in interviews. Though there were only six interview participants, maximum variation sampling (Gray, 2004; Patton, 2002) was used to select students who represent different genders, races, and ethnicities, as well as students identified as ELL and ESS. While one generally wants to avoid maximum variation sampling when working with small samples due to the ways it can prevent patterns and trends from appearing (Patton, 2002), it is a reasonable approach for narrative research, where the focus is on individual participants' stories and experiences. Furthermore, Patton (2002) argues that the patterns that do appear despite the use of maximum variation sample in small samples help us identify core experiences and phenomena that affect students across categories of difference.

The one-on-one semi-structured interviews took place during the students' flexible learning time (FLT). This is a 30-minute period every day after lunch in which students have additional time to complete any missing assignments or finish daily work for their classes. The interviews were held in the researcher's office to ensure student privacy and to have a quiet space to work. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions

were stored in a Google folder that had privacy settings set to only be shared with my dissertation chair.

Because this study was narrative and relied on students' telling their stories, a semi-structured interview format was used to guide the conversation but also allow students the freedom to guide when necessary. An interview protocol (Appendix C) was created, which drew on McCormick's (2012) protocol in which drawings and interviews were gathered to understand student perceptions of giftedness and engagement. The major difference between McCormick's protocol and the present study is that the former had students draw and interview at the same time, one-on-one (draw-interview-draw-interview). While the general interview structure is similar, the present study pulled students after they completed their drawings as part of a whole group exercise, with the interview being the only piece that was one-on-one. In this way, the interviewer had the drawings out when the student arrived, and the interviewer asked questions post-drawing versus during drawing.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis involved a multi-phase approach informed by narrative as well as more inductive forms of data analysis. This is similar to the analysis by Yamamoto (2021), who analyzed perceptions of self among students with autism. He first analyzed each transcript independently to understand each narrative; then, he analyzed collectively, grouping them into major themes. "Through this process, groups were created, not through similarities in events or phenomena, but rather through similarities in the essence expressed by the child" (p. 4). Following this model, the researcher began by crafting a summary narrative of each student's

experience overall based on narrative and experiential elements of their drawings as well as their responses in the interview to create a holistic look at their story as a reader. Subsequently, a qualitative, inductive approach was used when analyzing the collective set of student drawings as well as the collective set of interviews.

Inductive Analysis of Interviews. Rather than coding the drawings themselves, the data gathered from student drawings was used as an avenue for students to tell their stories within the semi-structured interview. This was designed to allow the researcher to go into the interviews without preconceived notions of the story that the students were trying to tell. By allowing the students to explain their drawings in the interviews, the students remained in the driver seat in the telling of their stories. The individual student interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai. Following transcription, the texts were read and analyzed multiple times to familiarize myself with the overall stories that students were telling.

First, the transcripts were uploaded as individual primary documents to the Atlas.ti platform. Before coding, the researcher decided to use an inductive thematic approach. As opposed to a deductive approach, in which the researcher prepares codes ahead of time in anticipation of core concepts that may appear in the data, the inductive approach "involves developing concepts using raw data to create themes based on the interpretation of the data" (Azungah, 2018). This was another decision made by the researcher to not go into the analysis phase with preconceived notions; rather, the codes and themes revealed themselves throughout the process of analyzing the data.

Second, open coding was used on the six documents to allow the researcher to identify initial codes within the student interviews and to begin breaking the data into smaller parts. Specifically, the researcher coded each individual transcription of the interview using the Atlas.ti website. Examples of codes include desire for group reading, seclusion and peace, social distractions, technological distractions, etc. The researcher then re-read each document sentence-by-sentence to ensure that no relevant potential codes were missed. This process was repeated until no new codes emerged.

Third, axial coding was used, which allowed the researcher to re-organize the data, begin to draw connections between the identified codes, and identify patterns among student lived experiences. From there, the researcher was able to identify themes among the student interview data. In total, six themes emerged, including "reading as an (inter)personal experience," "perceived roadblocks to reading achievement and enjoyment," "social comparisons of reading," "student ideal selves and perfect worlds," "change of reading enjoyment over time," and "motivation increased with texts that participants personally deemed interesting." A codebook was developed (Appendix D) to outline emergent themes along with accompanying codes within each theme.

Limitations

In terms of limitations, analysis of children's drawings has been described as subjective and has been criticized for this reason (Prosser, 2008). This made the interview an important addition to the study. Additionally, the sample size was dependent on the number of students who brought back their signed parent permission slips, which resulted in a smaller than

anticipated sample. Finally, the findings of this study could be hard to generalize, as a very individual-based research design with narrative research, along with methodology with individual images and interviews was used.

Validity and Trustworthiness of Interpretation

To ensure credibility, the researcher used triangulation of data, including student drawings and interviews, as well as triangulation of frameworks (Glesne, 2016; Lather, 2003). The frameworks from which I worked are narrative inquiry, inductive thematic analysis, and image-based research. The researcher also used member-checking to ensure narratives accurately reflect student experiences. Specifically, one-on-one conversations were conducted to ensure that participant drawings and interviews were accurately interpreted and represented within student narratives.

To ensure transferability, the researcher included a diverse sampling of students from different backgrounds and educational models. Additionally, the researcher provided a contextual description of the site (MMS), as well as detailed descriptions of subjects, situations, time, and procedures. To ensure dependability, the researcher's dissertation chair served as an inquiry auditor. Also, research-based methods were triangulated, including image-based research (Prosser, 2008) and accompanying student interviews. To ensure confirmability, the researcher used an audit trail to ensure transparency of how data was collected and analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

Students were not negatively affected by my research (do no harm). In addition, student data was kept confidential, and their privacy maintained. I sought approval from both Kennesaw State University and the school's district office before collecting data. I also ensured that students and parents knew that participation is voluntary and sent out a permission slip before using any student drawings in my study.

Chapter 4. Findings

Participant Overview

Student participants included three male students and three female students, all 14 years of age. Students were from different backgrounds and have had a variety of experiences with reading, as well as a variety of hobbies outside of school. Included first in chapter four is the individual narrative for each participant. Within each narrative, participant drawings are also included, along with participant explanations for each picture. Following the narratives, themes that emerged across narratives are explored.

Student Narratives

Gustavo's Story

If you visit Mrs. Kaye's ELA class right as she dismisses for lunch, you will probably notice one student who lingers behind the rest. While other students rush out the door to meet their friends and start their much-awaited lunch period, Gustavo will slowly put up his supplies, prepare his lunch box, and make his way out after the crowd has long gone. He never leaves the room without a friendly, "Have a great day!"

Gustavo is a 14-year-old Hispanic eighth grader at Mountain Middle School. He comes from a large family, including many aunts, uncles, and cousins with whom he spends a lot of time. He describes his family as "very loving, caring, and supportive." In his immediate family, he lives with his mom, dad, and little brother, who is in first grade. When he isn't at school, he likes to go to the gym to work out or go swimming. He says that he enjoys these things because

"I want to get more stronger in my legs. I love running, and I love swimming a lot... I go to sinkholes in Mexico for vacation and they're called 'cenotes.' It's in caves or outside, but it's just like a little lake, a little pond, but it's very deep. It's cold, but I like swimming deep because I like exploring it." When asked if he had considered the swimming team in high school, he stated, "I don't really want to go because of homework, and I don't usually take after school."

As a reader, Gustavo says that he is "okay, or good at, reading, but only when reading out loud." He continues to say that "When I read things in my head, I usually forget the words and forget about the story. Whenever I'm reading out loud, I remember." He has always felt that he is an "okay or good" reader, and that while he has dealt with a stutter when reading, no human is perfect. "I think I used to like reading a lot when I was a child, whenever I was more little because it was a good break from doing work whenever I was in school. It was more relaxing. Now... I still think it's relaxing, but I wouldn't do it at home." He said it feels more like work now because "In elementary, we had this reading time where we read our own books and it was a tiny little break. Now, whenever we read, it's always for work or writing something." He also said in elementary, he got to choose the books that he read, which he liked better.

When Gustavo thinks about his biggest challenges in reading, he goes back to times when "instead of reading out loud, like in a real session, we started to read in our heads." This is the biggest message that transcends Gustavo's story, both spoken and in his drawing.

Gustavo's biggest success in reading is the time he wrote his own book like many of his favorites. It was a scary story in his journal, and though he didn't submit it to the state competition (which is what made him start the story), he said he couldn't stop writing. He would

revisit it again and again to keep adding to the story. He unfortunately didn't keep the story, but it's something that he remembers and thinks back on as a major success.

Figure 3

Gustavo's Drawings
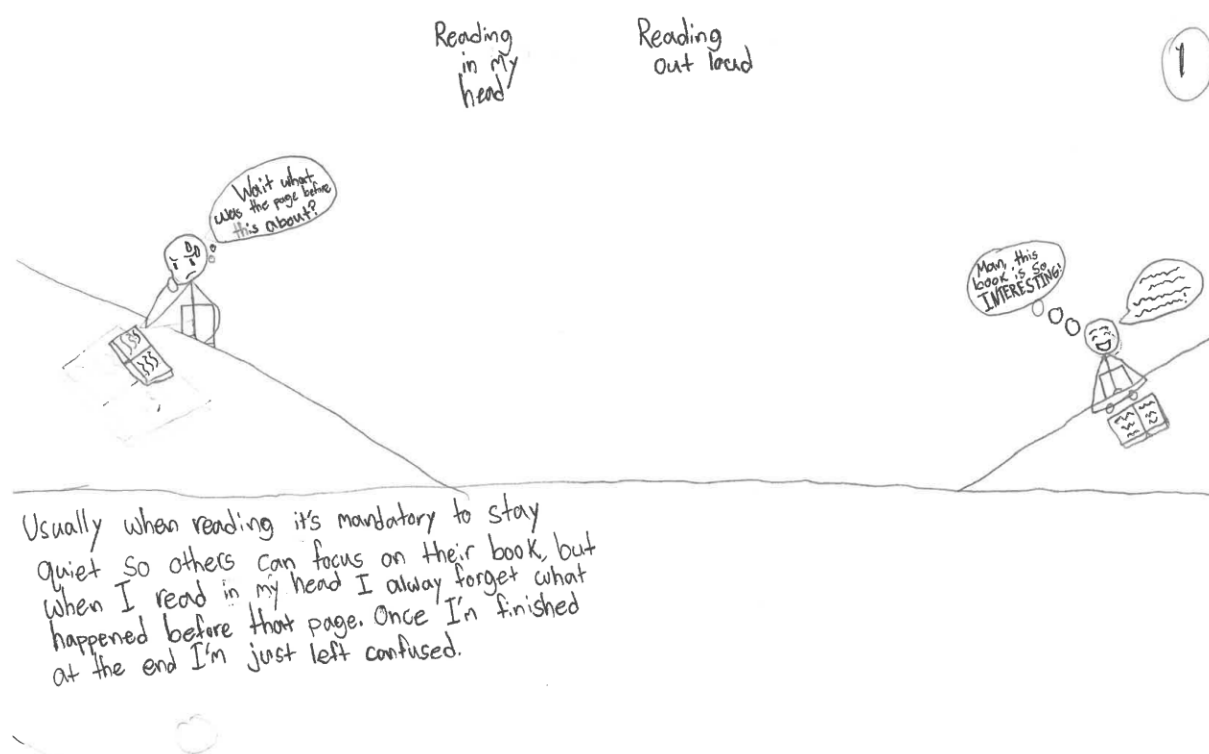
Drawing One (Left):

"It was just showing that whenever I read in my head, I forget what the last page that I was just reading was talking about." He remembers feeling this way starting in sixth grade when he was asked to read in his head more, had fewer teacher read-alouds, and fewer audiobooks. According to Gustavo, if the person in his drawing were the hero of a story, the villain would be

"like a governor...who makes everything, every single little thing mandatory. He or she is a very nit-picky person who makes everything mandatory, and everything has to be silent." The hero, on the other hand, wants things to be spoken and for people to have free choice.

Drawing Two (Right):

Though Gustavo would like to be "better at reading in his head," he thinks the best world would be where students have the chance to read out loud. "In a perfect world, reading out loud would happen more so that everyone knows what they're reading. Maybe if we're in a group session where we're reading the same book, we could read out loud together, so we can all know where we are at and all be quicker." Gustavo says the person in the second picture is feeling "happy" because he is able to read out loud and understand his reading, whereas in the first picture, the person in the drawing is feeling "stressed."

Moving forward, Gustavo says he thinks he will read a book "maybe two or three times a year," but only if he finds it interesting and if he has an opportunity to read it out loud. In the classroom, he has ideas of how he would like to engage in reading. "Maybe if we are, if everybody is reading the same book, maybe we could call students to a little table to read about that book and read together so that they know what they are supposed to be doing and what's happening in the story."

Dylan's Story

Dylan enters the room for his interview with a nervous expression, sits down at the rectangular table, and asks the question burning in his mind. With sincerity, he questions, "Am I

in trouble for drawing fire in the library?" I assure him that he is in no trouble at all, that I know the fire represents a part of his story, which I'm very interested in hearing. I tell him that his picture is one of the most detailed I've seen, and that makes me extremely excited to talk to him about it. He looks relieved, as his shoulders drop and the corners of his mouth lift into a slight smile.

Dylan is a 14-year-old white eighth grader at Mountain Middle School. He comes from a very small family. "It's just me and my mom and dad and sister, but my, me and my uncle always hang out like every weekend. He's the one that's taught me guitar." Guitar is one of the things that Dylan loves to do outside of school, as he's been playing for two years now. "I played at the school prom with my band. I just really, I like to write my own music and stuff like that. And play famous songs and stuff." He also enjoys skateboarding, but because he lives on top of a hill, he doesn't get to do it as much as he would like. "I don't want to like... go down the hill on accident. But besides that, like I like to draw and write, and I like to read...like H.P. Lovecraft is my favorite author. And I just like to talk to my friends and stuff."

As a reader, Dylan has "always liked reading, but it's just...I never really started reading like actual books. I would just really read like comic books and stuff like that. But just recently I started reading like Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft." Dylan describes his reading habits as "not like a huge reader, but if I'm bored and I don't feel like taking out my guitar and I don't feel like talking to anybody and I want to be in my own world... I have a book, and it's by H.P. Lovecraft, and it has a bunch of different little, short stories in it, and so I'll just flip to one I want to read." He enjoys short stories because they're interesting and quick. He says longer stories are

good if you want to be connected, but "but it's like it takes me a long time. I have, like a short attention, span. So I like short stories."

As a child, he doesn't remember anyone reading to him often, but he does remember being surrounded by comics. "I did it by myself because my uncle and my dad were comic book collectors, and so like that was always around me when I was a little kid, and my Spiderman and Batman and Wolverine were always really cool to me, so I would read those." When he was in third grade, he remembers having so many comics at home that he tried other books at school. Particularly, he remembers reading war books, such as the *I Survived* books while in silent reading time.

Moving into the middle school era of his reading experience, he feels like he gets to read "cooler things," such as *The Outsiders* and *The Hunger Games*. He recalls his biggest challenge in reading, which came in the seventh grade. "I was reading *The Giver* last year like I liked reading it, but it was like my attention span was so bad, and like I would barely ever pay attention in class or anything, so I would just like... I was stuck with myself to read it and to get into it, and so I would really have to spend a lot of time trying to get into the book, and, like... like I said, I would never really pay attention, so we were already kind of deep into the book, so I would have to like to go back a couple chapters and catch up all the way. I did it eventually, and I actually liked it." He thinks what made this challenging was other people in the classroom because he has always gotten along with people. "So it's like every single English class I have, or really class in general, I always have like more than at least 3 friends in there. So it's like whenever I'm trying to read it, I'm always distracted socializing." This situation also ended up

being Dylan's self-identified biggest success in reading. Because he took it on himself to catch

up and finish the book during free time or even at home, he is incredibly proud of that

accomplishment.

Figure 4

Dylan's Drawings

Drawing One (Left):

"Like... I said, I love comic books so, and usually like a term people use to call like a book, well, just really, in general they call anything good is like saying it's 'fire.' So it's like this comic is fire, and then I took that to make it literal. And then I like, set it on fire, and then somebody like the library worker or something is like, 'Sir, leave the library because there's a fire! And then I'm like, 'Can't you see I'm reading?" This represents his feelings towards reading because he does like comic books, and his favorite in elementary school was the *Captain Underpants* series. His picture is modeled after the funny, comic style drawings in *Captain Underpants*. When drawing, he was thinking back to times in the library where he would read on the carpet or shop in the bookfair with his friends or his grandparents. "Every year, my grandparents would take me to the book fair, and they'd get me like 2 or 3 books, and like I'd read them all the time, and I would always get the newest addition of like 'Dogman' or like, 'Captain Underpants' and stuff. I loved the author."

If the picture were a story in itself, Dylan says that the protagonist is just trying to read his comic book. The villain in this situation would be someone who is trying to keep him from reading his comic book or make him choose something else. "People trying to prevent his reading of comics. Like I used to play this game called Skyrim, and it's like they would give you... like you would have life skills, and... up here [points to top of page] it says like plus 15 fire resistance or whatever. And so this guy, he's like resisting the fire, and he's just trying to read a comic book. But she's trying to tell him to leave, and he's just like brushing it off like 'Don't tell me to leave. I'm reading.'"

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Drawing Two (Right):

"I wanted to be like the like, the Megamind reader, right? So I was like...I've got all this knowledge and stuff, and I'm just like... I got stacks of books. And then that library teacher comes back, and she's getting mad because I'm hogging all the books like I'm taking them off of the shelves and stuff. I'm just reading them all, so she's like, 'sir you got to stop reading. You're getting too smart.' She's still like the bad guy, but in a different way." Rather than "fire resistance," Dylan included multiple "+15's" in knowledge. This is because "I have much more books here, which means much more like knowledge on reading." He goes on to say that he feels like, "maybe in an ideal world. I could finally be more focused on books, because right now it's really hard for me to focus on reading. Like my attention…like with all the stuff in my room. It's hard to read, because, like I've got like I got like a TV, I've got like my guitar, I've got my skateboard. I've got all this stuff, and usually I have like people over my house, whether it be like my sister or guests, or anything like that. I'm just like It's very hard for me to focus and just focus on reading."

Moving forward, Dylan would like to find more time to read, specifically outside. "I love reading outside. It makes me feel like really connected to the world and stuff. It's nice. And there are fewer distractions when you're outside. You're so connected to the world, but you're also connected to yourself because of how much you're just alone." He also wants to continue to seek books that he's interested in and would like to do the same within his classes. "I'm just really finding out what kind of topics I like, because the reason I love Lovecraft is because I love horror movies and stuff like that. So really you just got to find out the things that you like and

what you're interested in, and then eventually you'll just find yourself going into a rabbit hole of knowledge and information." He feels that teachers could help students find their interests, not just by allowing choice, but supporting students in the selection process. "They let you go out into the library and choose a book, but they don't really explain how to choose a book. They should tell you, 'You should find out what you're interested in or what you're interested in being interested in.' And if you can't find a book—maybe talk to them and help assign a book. Libraries are big and there are so many to choose from that it's hard to know where to start."

Nia's Story

Nia sits with her friends in the after-school program, laughing along with her fellow eighth graders. Some days, she is loud with them, sharing the latest joke she read on social media; other days, she is quiet and withdrawn. When speaking to her, she is always polite and kind, especially in environments where she feels safe. There are also times when she feels overwhelmed and anxious: in crowds, when having to present, and when being filmed, for example. In the mornings, she can be found waiting for the morning bell in the counseling office, away from the noisy cafeteria. During class change, she has permission to leave a few minutes early to avoid the hustle and bustle of the crowded hallways. These traits do not define her story, but they shape her story and the way she tells it, often choosing not to elaborate as much as her peers when talking about herself and/or her situation.

Nia is a 14-year-old African American student at Mountain Middle School. She lives with her father, who works night shift. When she isn't at school, she enjoys reading and drawing. She showed me some of her drawings, and she is incredibly talented. She takes pride in her art,

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as it is her passion. She can frequently be seen drawing on paper, but she has recently taken on creating art using technology, such as her phone and school computer.

In elementary school, what Nia remembers most is reading groups. "We would read as a group at a table, and we had like different groups for which level, like which level you were reading. I always hated it because I was in the higher level, so they make us like all talk with each other." Her experience with reading groups was that of forced communication, which made her uncomfortable. Middle school has been a similar experience, but a little bit more comfortable. "You wouldn't be made to stand in front everybody and read. We still have to talk to each other, but it's more casual. I don't feel like I'm under a microscope."

One situation that stands out as a challenge in her reading experience was when she had to keep a reading log. "Oh, yeah, elementary school. When we had those reading logs we had to do, and so we had to read for I think, an hour every day at home, and I always fall asleep during it. And my parents wouldn't sign the paper. I hated it." She could not think of a time when she felt really successful in reading.

Figure 5

Nia's Drawings
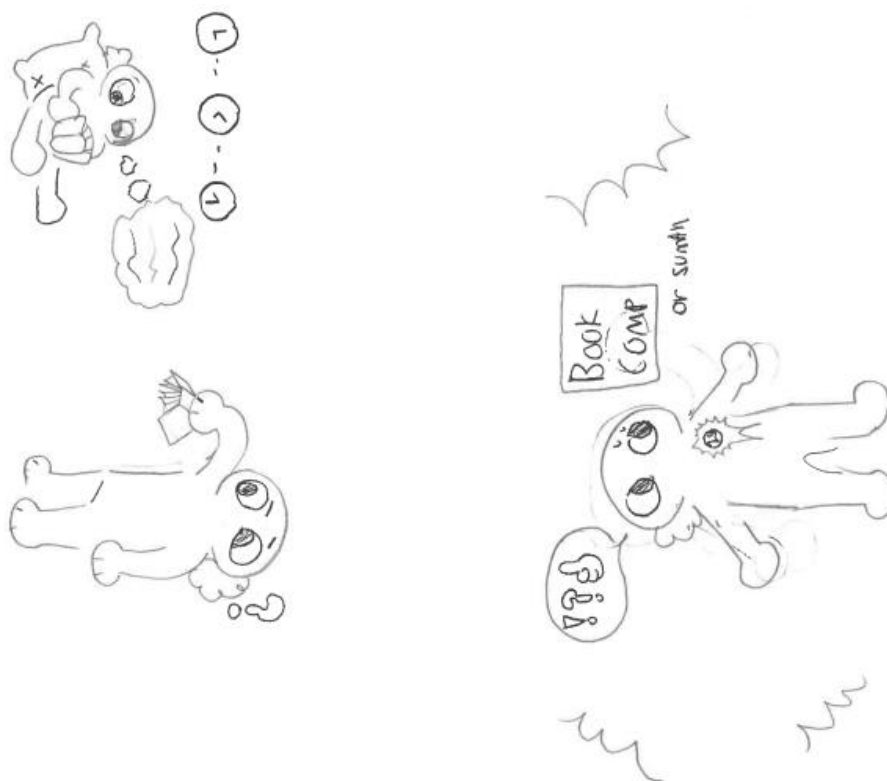
Drawing One (Left):

"I feel like sometimes when I'm reading, I get confused by it. I don't know how to explain it, but the way that I read is like...weird. A lot of the books that I would like don't really match how I like to read them. It's just the way it's written and the way it describes what's going on...I feel like it's hard to follow." In her experience, when she does find a book that she enjoys reading, it takes a lot of time [represented by the clocks in the drawing]. "I read really slowly, so it takes a while."

If the people in drawing one were heroes in a story, Nia said there could be a couple of villains, the first, being forced to read. She again referenced the reading log, when she actually liked the books, but the act of being forced to read made her not want to do it at all. The second set of villains were books that are uninteresting to her. She said that uninteresting books made a difficult task even harder.

Drawing Two (Right):

In an ideal world, Nia would feel confident when reading. "I guess just understanding more what I'm doing and being able to...I don't know the word... say or recall what I read." She would also win reading awards. She has watched her friends be successful in reading, win awards, and one friend has entered and won the Young Georgia Authors writing competition for her grade level. She saw this as something that her friend is really proud of, and a feeling that she'd like to experience as well.

Moving forward, Nia would like to find more novels that she likes to read, specifically graphic novels.

Harrison's Story

Picture a bustling middle school English language arts classroom. Students are at tables working and talking amongst themselves. The teacher is hustling from group to group, managing the classroom while providing support to students who need extra support. Undoubtedly, one or more students demand more attention than others. Harrison is not one of those students—not behaviorally, at least. Harrison is the type of student that could easily "fall under the radar." He

could be described as a quiet, respectful student who generally does his work. He has a small group of friends, and he seems to just go with the flow.

Harrison is a white, 14-year-old student at Mountain Middle School. Outside of school, he likes to hang out with his friends and spend time with his family. He describes his family as "pretty normal," living with his mom, dad, and older sister. He doesn't have any specific activity that he prefers to do with his friends and family, just spending quality time with them is a good day to him.

As a reader, he feels like his opinion has changed since he was a child. "I read occasionally, but not as much as I used to." As an elementary school student, he liked to read because he felt like there were more books that were thrilling. He also feels like he had more time. Harrison has felt success as a middle schooler, though. "There was one time I was reading this mystery book and the reader had to try to like figure out—it was a murder mystery. And I figured it out pretty early in the book." Though he doesn't love reading as much as he used to, he does still find time to read at home. "I read articles. I go to the British Broadcasting Channel, BBC, for most of my articles. Occasionally, I read a few chapters of a book. It's still mysteries mostly."

Figure 6

Harrison's Drawings

Drawing One (Left):

"I drew reading on like a soccer field because I like to read out in the open. It gives me like a positive feeling because, you know, it's like sunny out and you're feeling good." He feels like he is more motivated to read outside than when he is confined inside. This picture was based on a recent, memorable experience that he had reading. "Last year, I was reading at the soccer field during ELA class. It was just nice and relaxing."

If this character on the soccer field was a "good guy" in a story, Harrison says the bad guy in the story would be one of a few things. First, it could be something physical that prevents

him from reading, such as the weather. "I think like, probably weather, that would be clouded and make it not warm and maybe raining." The biggest struggle for this reader, though, would be noise, as even outside on the soccer field, he could hear other students, which was a little distracting. What led this character to liking to read outside would be instances where it was noisy inside, or where the character struggled to focus.

Drawing Two (Right):

In a perfect world for Harrison, "reading in an enclosed area would be more relaxing." He doesn't feel like he currently has the opportunity to read in quiet, relaxing environments. "Not really, because I only read in like FLT and stuff. And FLT is always really loud." Moving forward, Harrison would like to find more time to be able to focus and read. "Maybe like take some time to you, know, like...30 minutes each day to go outside and read."

Alondra's Story

Before this study, I haven't met Alondra. When I call for her to come to my room for the interview, there is slight confusion on the room number. After several minutes and many non-Alondra's walking past, I ask one brown-haired, sweet-faced girl, "Are you Alondra?"

"Yes!" she replies with a smile.

I excitedly respond, "Yay! I found you!"

She laughs as we entered my room. As we sit down, I thank her for being willing to participate in my study and share her reading experiences with me. I tell her that I have looked over her drawing, and I can't wait to hear her thoughts and story behind what she drew.

Alondra is a 14-year-old student at Mountain Middle School. Outside of school, she likes to spend time with her family. "I have two little sisters—one is 12 and one is 4 months. Honestly, when I'm at home, I just spend time with my parents." She also has several hobbies that she enjoys in her free time. "I play softball. I like to paint, like a lot, and I like drawing." In terms of reading at home, she has some poetry books, but she also helps her mom, who is also in school. "She like reads a lot and I help her sometimes. I help her study with like flash cards. I will read like the text to her, and she will like say it back to me."

Alondra "kind of" considers herself a reader. "I mean, I enjoy reading if it's like a topic that I actually like. I really like poems. I like poem books, and I have a lot of those at home. But it's not like I would choose to read over some of my other activities." As a young child, what Alondra remembers most about reading is reading logs, which she didn't like because "I don't know, I feel like, since I was a first grader, it felt like a chore. Like, obviously it was a chore because it was homework, but I feel like it was like an obligation that I had to do it, so I feel like as a little kid I didn't like reading as much as I do now." Unlike some students, middle school is a time when Alondra found her enjoyment of reading. "When I think about reading, I think about my sixth grade ELA class. That's when I started to enjoy, and I started to actually want to read. I think it was just the teacher that I had and how she made reading fun. It wasn't like I had to do it or a chore...she made it fun."

Figure 7

Alondra's Drawings
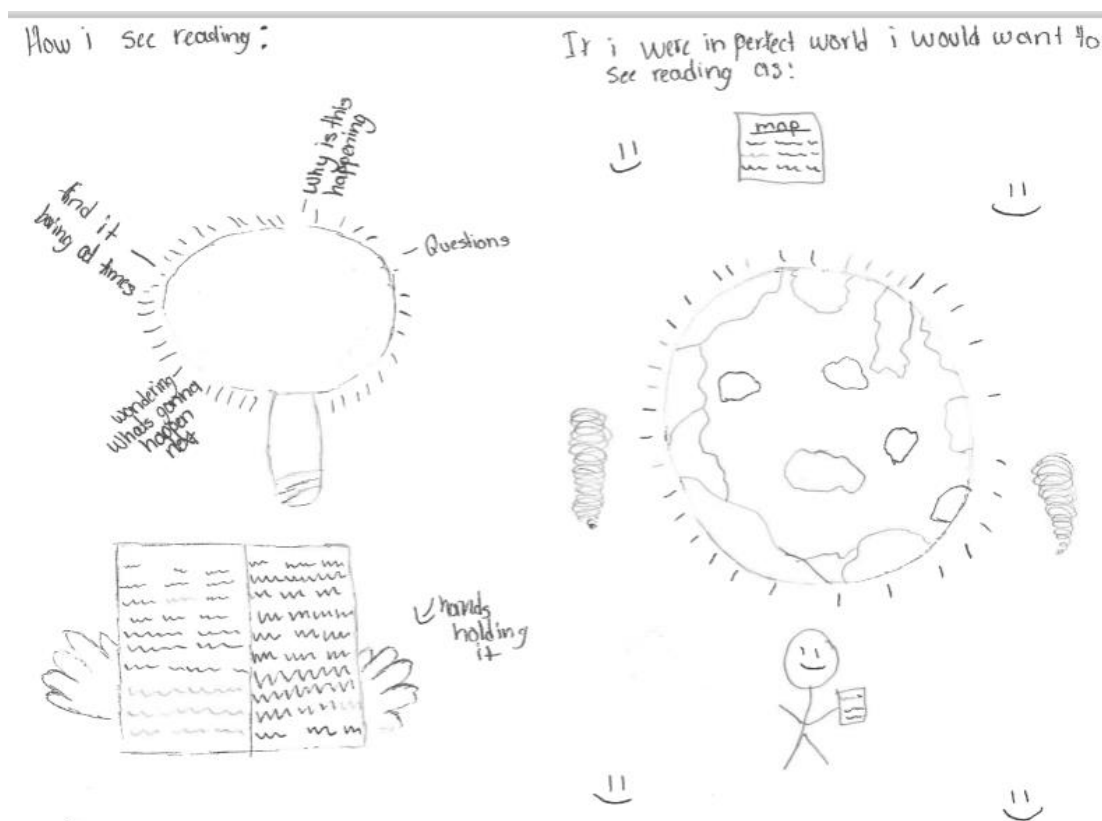
The biggest challenge that she has faced as a reader has been this year when her class read *The Outsiders*. "I didn't really understand the story...like the plot of Pony Boy and Johnny. It was hard to fill out the papers that Mrs. Green had us do because I didn't really understand it. I think because I get like very unfocused, and I feel like I was unfocused on the days that she had us read the book, so it just didn't make any sense to me. So I would read it over and over to make it make sense, but it just wouldn't click." A time that she felt really successful in reading was "I think last year we had like this book report that we had to do, and I got a really good grade on it.

I was proud of myself, cause normally like...I can't like write like that. I won't make sense. But I got a good grade on this, so I was really proud of myself for that. I think it was because it was a book that I really got into, but I can't remember the name of it."

Drawing One (Left):

"I drew a lightbulb because obviously, I have a lot of questions that pop up in my head when I read. Sometimes I find it boring, but that's happening less. I feel like I'm just an okay reader. If it's an informational text, I usually won't understand it. But I usually understand more when I'm reading fiction, specifically fantasy."

Drawing Two (Right):

"I drew a planet, and in this planet, I would like to read more often than I do it now. I would like to not like struggle with topics or genres. I feel like I would just want to be an improved reader than I am now." She said that in her perfect world, it would just click. In a perfect world, she wouldn't have as many questions, and she wouldn't have to re-read the text multiple times for understanding. "I think it's rare that it just clicks. Most of the time I struggle to focus when I'm reading."

Moving forward, she would like to read more often, and she thinks that it's important to find time outside of school. "Cause I feel like...before I didn't really like it. Now that I've found some topics and genres that I like, I want to try to read more." She also thinks that there could be more time and space in the classroom for students to find those topics and genres that they enjoy, which would make them want to read more, both in and out of school.

Marisol's Story

It is early May, and anyone who has worked in education knows that May can be unpredictable. I was unprepared for how unpredictable this May would be. A series of events lead me to worrying about gathering my final interview. Not only do we have two Milestones tests scheduled for the week, which majorly disrupts our regular schedule; we also have a bus situation which leaves many students without transportation to school. On any given day for a few weeks, we have been unsure how many students would be attending school.

When it's Marisol's turn to interview, I am relieved that she is both at school and finished with all of her testing. Marisol has a calm, sweet demeanor. She politely waits while I set up my equipment, and nods sheepishly when I ask if she is ready to get started. As we begin the interview, I tell her how excited I am to hear her story. I didn't even know myself yet just how unique, intriguing, and powerful her story would be!

Marisol is a 14-year-old Hispanic student at Mountain Middle School. In school, her favorite subject is math. She is also a member of a "planting" club, and although they have begun planting things, nothing has grown yet. She is excited to see how the plants continue to progress over time. Outside of school, she likes to tag along with whatever her parents are doing and just "hang out with them." She is close with her family, who she would not describe as a "reading family." "My parents are Hispanic. My dad finished going to school at like...12 years old?...to go to work. And then my mom, I think she reads...she went to school, but it was all in Spanish. For them to give their child an English education, it's good for me, but they don't really understand most of it. I always saw in movies parents reading to their kids at night, but I didn't

think it was a real thing at night. So one day, I asked my dad to read to me, and I guess he felt bad, and he actually did it, but I don't think he could read it. I mean, he was reading it, but it was a bit butchered, and I don't know if he understood what he was reading to me. I was in like second grade." She also has two brothers, one of whom is much younger than her, who she "didn't really like to read." She describes her older brother as "not really good at school...which is okay, everyone has their own thing." In terms of reading, she believes "I don't think anybody in my family really saw a purpose in it, so I've kind of had to be on my own...really in any school subject, but especially in reading. I've always been on my own to read." Though she speaks to her mother primarily in Spanish, Marisol cannot read Spanish. Her father continues to work and is now fluent in speaking English, so many of their conversations are in English. Although Marisol can speak both Spanish and English fluently, there isn't one common language that everyone in her family can speak, write, and read together.

Marisol's motivation for reading depends highly on her interest level of the text. "I don't read much unless I get really hooked onto a series. Like I had a book that my fifth-grade teacher, I think my fifth-grade teacher pushed me to read the most. So it was a series, and I started one book with a little group that we were in, and I ended up reading the complete series on my own. So if I get really hooked onto a book and it's interesting to me, then I'll get hooked on reading. If I don't, then I'm not interested in reading really."

In elementary school, Marisol's fifth grade year stands out as a year that helped shape her as a reader. "Because I don't really remember liking to read before that. Like I remember in my fifth-grade teacher had passion and it was more small groups, and she would share that passion

with me and then I got that passion and I read a lot that year, more than any other year." In sixth

and seventh grades, her experience with reading was "alright. It was mostly Reading Plus."

Reading Plus is a differentiated computer reading program that helps track student reading

progress across grade levels. Students are required to complete a set number of lessons per week

to have "time on the program," that then contributes to their usage and data. Marisol continues,

"What I remember most was Reading Plus and every once in a while, we were assigned a book."

She looks back more fondly on reading "actual" books and accompanying activities/assignments

much more than the Reading Plus program, which she described as "repetitive and pretty

boring."

This year, in eighth grade, she started reading many books, but didn't end up finishing

any of them. This was due to "time" and this year being "much more packed." Having eight

classes instead of six added more to her plate, and though she wanted to finish the books, there

were deadlines for turning them in. This year, they read the novel *The Outsiders*. "There's like a

lot of names. Remembering each name and each personality, I get so in my head about trying to

remember each name and the details that I forget to enjoy the book. That's like a struggle that

I've always had. Especially with *The Outsiders*, cause there's a main group that they mainly

focus on, and then there's a bigger group, and a bigger group altogether. So remembering each

personality, each name, and each person is a big struggle." Thinking back, Marisol believes this

is a struggle that she has dealt with for a while as a reader. "Yeah, remembering each name. You

probably don't need to remember each name. It's probably just in your head. There's just an

anxiety that carries on with it that makes it where you don't enjoy reading that. So I carry that

feeling of wanting to remember each and every single detail, even if it makes me enjoy the book less." She believes that this is her biggest challenge as a reader. Sometimes, when she finishes a page, "I know I read it, I know I did. But I was in my head so much that I can't remember anything. It makes the first couple of chapters of any book really hard. Because I'm reading it, but I'm not actually comprehending it because I'm trying to make sense of all of the names and details."

Currently, she does not read at home. She feels like when she gets into a good series at school, she will carry it home and continue reading. However, "If I don't like the book, then I don't find use in reading it." Finishing the series that she started in fifth grade is what she considers her biggest success in reading so far because there are six books in that series and she finished it on her own.

Drawing One (Left):

"As a reader right now, it's really hard to get myself in the zone and get myself into the book. So, but when I do, it's like you're only in the book. That shows me that when you are in the book, there should be no distractions. It's difficult because I have many distractions around me. The picture represents how I can feel if I'm able to block out all of the distractions." This year, she doesn't feel like she is able to get to that place as a reader very often. She feels like the distractions are louder than ever before. Additionally, she feels like her cell phone is proving to be an extra distraction that she hasn't had before.

Figure 8

Marisol's Drawings

"You can't focus on small little task and be in the zone because of how much people are on their

phones, me specifically. And there's so much going on on phones in such a small period, where

you're expecting something new every 30 seconds or a minute, or every 10 seconds that you

scroll. It makes 30 seconds or a minute on a page seem harder to focus on because it doesn't

change. It isn't something new like what we see on our apps. It's so hard to focus on small little details because you've gotten so used to expecting something new."

Drawing Two (Right):

"This represents what I said about wanting to remember details. Not just in a story, but in informational text or anything as well. Just remembering general information." She explains that the biggest difference between the two images is that currently, it takes her a long time to get to this [image two] point where she can recall information well enough to have a conversation about what she read. "It's going to take me a while because right now, I can't get this. In a perfect world, it wouldn't take me as long to get there." She feels like this gets harder as she continues to get older because she has many more distractions than she did as a child. She perceives that her friends and other students have this ability much more naturally than she does, and this benefits them because they don't have to work as hard to block out distractions.

Moving forward, Marisol would love to find ways to track details and characters more easily. In the classroom, she hopes to see more opportunities for visual learning, as she feels that much of her experience has been auditory. Because she has trouble focusing, once the audio is gone, she has nothing to reference. Visuals not only help grab her attention, but they also serve as an anchor to come back to if needed.

Emerging Themes

Individual stories were key in this research. Understanding each student's unique journey provided insight into the stories and experiences of students at MMS. Each participant's story

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was powerful and important. When listening to each, themes began to emerge across multiple

narratives. When taken together, these themes begin to paint a picture of overall student

experiences and perspectives about reading. Six themes emerged from student stories of their

reading experiences, as well as their current perceptions of themselves as readers.

Table 2

Emerging Themes

Theme	Participants
Reading as an (inter)personal experience	Gustavo
	Dylan
	Harrison
	Marisol
Perceived roadblocks to reading enjoyment/achievement	Gustavo
	Dylan
	Nia
	Harrison
	Alondra
	Marisol
Social comparisons of reading	Nia
	Marisol
Student ideal selves and perfect worlds	Gustavo

	Dylan
	Nia
	Harrison
	Alondra
	Marisol
Change of reading enjoyment over time	Gustavo
	Dylan
	Nia
	Harrison
	Alondra
Motivation increased with texts that participants personally deemed interesting	Dylan
	Nia
	Alondra
	Marisol

Reading as an (Inter)personal Experience

What is the "best" way to engage with text in the classroom? Should students sit and read silently, allowing them time to "get lost" in a book and shut everything else out? Should students be given the opportunity to socially construct their understanding by reading out loud with the class and discussing that reading with their peers? The participants in this study suggest that when it comes to promoting positive perceptions of students' selves, there isn't a one-size-fits-all

approach. Some students felt most like "a reader" and enjoyed reading more when it was an interpersonal experience, when being afforded the ability to collaborate with their peers. Others, however, felt enjoyment and success when reading was a personal, introspective exercise. Four of the six participants in the study highlighted how this important factor can contribute to students feeling successful as readers, feeling enjoyment when reading, identifying themselves as "good readers," and finding interest in reading at all.

Dylan, Harrison, and Marisol all expressed desire to engage with reading as a personal experience. These students enjoy reading and feel more like "readers" when they can isolate with a book and "disconnect" from the world. Dylan expressed that, "I want to be in my own world." In his drawing, the character is being rushed out of the library to which he responds, "Can't you see I'm reading?" To Dylan, reading is a way to disconnect from reality and get lost in the book. Harrison expressed a similar sentiment, citing a time that his class was allowed to go outside and find a spot to read alone. While this was an improvement over reading in the classroom, even the presence of his classmates nearby at the field reduced his enjoyment at the time. He would like more opportunities to read in solitary, quiet, and relaxed environments. For Marisol, sometimes getting "into" the book can be difficult, but "when I do, it's like you're only in the book...when you are in the book, there should be no distractions." These students desire reading experiences where they can get lost in a book and shut everything else out, providing them the opportunity to connect with the text on an individual level.

On the other hand, some students expressed the desire to read out loud and engage with the text as a social, interpersonal interaction. For these students, their reading identity and

enjoyment is tied to being able to verbally engage in reading and discussing texts. For some, it is this method that helps them make sense of what they're reading. The biggest proponent of this method was Gustavo. For Gustavo, being forced to read silently causes him the most trouble when trying to engage with a text. He says, "whenever I read in my head, I forget what the last page that I was just reading was talking about." Rather than the silent, independent method, Gustavo prefers to read in settings where "if everybody is reading the same book, maybe we could call students to a little table to read about that book and read together so that they know what they are supposed to be doing and what's happening in the story." While Marisol expressed interest in reading as a personal experience, she also gave a nod to the benefits of reading socially. In her stories, she revealed that she found her love of a series in her fifth grade reading classroom, where she read the first book in a small group. She then finished the rest of the series on her own. For Marisol, this in-class social interaction is what got her "hooked" on the book enough to finish reading the series independently. Though schools (particularly starting in middle school) often create structures where students must read silently, Gustavo and Marisol help shine light on some benefits of social reading, including helping with comprehension, reading enjoyment, and the discovery of new reading interests, all of which informed their perceptions of themselves as readers.

Perceived Roadblocks to Reading Enjoyment/Achievement

As educators, we have many ideas of why students struggle in the reading classroom. With the best of intentions, educators attempt to bridge these gaps and help students move past these roadblocks to a more successful reading experience. The question is, do our perceptions

match the student perceptions of what blocks them from being a successful reader? All six students within their unique stories shared what they viewed as the biggest roadblock to their reading enjoyment and/or achievement. Because students' perceptions of themselves as readers inform and are informed by their experiences of enjoyment and success in reading, it is incredibly valuable to learn more about the things they perceive as roadblocks to their reading enjoyment and achievement.

Roadblock One: Reading Retention and Comprehension. The ability to comprehend a text and recall information from that reading was a roadblock mentioned by multiple students. For Gustavo, this was especially true when being asked to read silently. He remembers feeling this way starting in sixth grade when he was asked to read in his head more, had fewer teacher read-alouds, and fewer audiobooks. In Dylan's case, he showcased this desire to retain all reading within his second drawing. "I wanted to be like the like, the Megamind reader, right? So I was like...I've got all this knowledge and stuff, and I'm just like... I got stacks of books.... I'm just reading them all, so she's [the librarian] like, 'sir you got to stop reading. You're getting too smart.'...I have much more books here, which means much more like knowledge on reading." Nia also expressed retention as a roadblock, "I feel like sometimes when I'm reading, I get confused by it. I don't know how to explain it, but the way that I read is like...weird. A lot of the books that I would like don't really match how I like to read them. It's just the way it's written and the way it describes what's going on...I feel like it's hard to follow." Nia goes on to say that in her perfect world, retention of reading material wouldn't be an issue. "I guess just

understanding more what I'm doing and being able to...I don't know the word... say or recall what I read."

For Marisol, the pressure to remember what she was reading interfered with the reading process itself. "I get so in my head about trying to remember each name and the details that I forget to enjoy the book. That's like a struggle that I've always had." Like others, this is the main message in her ideal world drawing. "This represents what I said about wanting to remember details. Not just in a story, but in informational text or anything as well. Just remembering general information." This perceived inability to recall text was among the most prevalent roadblocks cited by participants (four out of six students) and contributed to students feeling like unsuccessful readers.

Roadblock Two: Distractions. Four out of the six participants mentioned distractions from reading as a major roadblock to feeling enjoyment and success as a reader. Not surprisingly, there wasn't one single thing that distracted students from reading. Rather, there were many types of distractions mentioned, some that were similar based on norms of modern society and some that varied by student and their unique life experiences.

Some students felt that social distractions within the classroom hindered their ability to be successful readers. For Dylan, having friends in his reading class pulled his focus away from reading. "It's like every single English class I have… I always have like more than at least 3 friends in there. So it's like whenever I'm trying to read it, I'm always distracted socializing." This was similar for Harrison, who identified "noise" as his biggest struggle because he could hear other students, which was "a little distracting." For those who preferred reading by

themselves as a personal experience, it is no surprise that noise and social distractions could be a roadblock for their reading success. Specifically, because the context in which these students experience enjoyment/success in reading is when they are alone, the distractions can lend negative associations with reading to their self-perceptions.

Technology is more prevalent than ever in our society, so it is logical that it could distract students from traditional reading as well. Unlike adults, who witnessed the advent of and adapted to the use of personal devices (e.g., laptops, smart phones, tablets) and social media as they were released, students currently in eighth grade have had access to these technologies for almost their entire lives. While not all students recognize the negative impact of technology, Marisol cited it as a major roadblock to being a successful reader

> You can't focus on small little task and be in the zone because of how much people are on their phones, me specifically. And there's so much going on on phones in such a small period, where you're expecting something new every 30 seconds or a minute, or every 10 seconds that you scroll. It makes 30 seconds or a minute on a page seem harder to focus on because it doesn't change. It isn't something new like what we see on our apps. It's so hard to focus on small little details because you've gotten so used to expecting something new.

> This awareness of the impact of social media on student learning isn't something one hears often from 14-year-old eighth graders. Marisol brings an awareness in her story of how apps such as TikTok, Instagram (Stories), and Facebook (Reels), which produce new

content every 30 to 60 seconds, can impact students' ability to engage with and enjoy classroom activities, specifically reading.

Still other distractions from reading resulted from the fullness of these students' lives. For the participants in this study, being a student is only part of who they are as people. They are also family members, friends, have various hobbies, and have different home situations outside of the reading classroom. Dylan captured this as one of his roadblocks.

> In an ideal world, I could finally be more focused on books, because right now it's really hard for me to focus on reading. Like my attention…like with all the stuff in my room. It's hard to read, because, like I've got like I got like a TV, I've got like my guitar, I've got my skateboard. I've got all this stuff, and usually I have like people over my house, whether it be like my sister or guests, or anything like that. I'm just like It's very hard for me to focus and just focus on reading.

Though Dylan captured this within his narrative, the essence can be applied to all participants given that they all are in the teenage phase of life where the school load gets heavier, social interactions become more important, and outside-of-school tasks (e.g., family obligations, hobbies, work) take up more and more time. Alondra also touched on this when she discussed that she started reading many books this school year but didn't finish any of them. This was due to "time" and this year being "much more packed." These stories shed light on the fact that students are having to choose how to budget their time outside of class, and there's more than just choosing "to read" or "not to read." Students have a multitude of options and must decide and prioritize how to use their afternoons. According to these eighth-grade students, reading

competes with technology, family time, social/friend time, after school jobs, and personal hobbies.

Roadblock Three: Reading as a "Chore". The idea of reading as a "chore" or requirement as a roadblock came up in four of the six participants' stories. Reading was coded as feeling like a chore when (a) autonomy thwarting conditions were present (e.g., required number of minutes; surveillance via requiring parental signature; restrictions on when, what or where they read, etc.) and/or (b) there were unclear/arbitrary goals or purpose (for example, the reading log is just about the number of minutes you read, but not about reading for pleasure or reading to learn). One specific "chore" that was mentioned in more than one student narrative was the task of completing reading logs. For Alondra, one of the things she remembers most about reading as a young child is reading logs, which she didn't like because

> I don't know, I feel like, since I was a first grader, it felt like a chore. Like, obviously it was a chore because it was homework, but I feel like it was like an obligation that I had to do it, so I feel like as a little kid I didn't like reading as much as I do now.

Nia has similar feelings toward reading logs, listing this activity as her biggest challenge in reading so far.

> Oh, yeah, elementary school. When we had those reading logs we had to do, and so we had to read for I think, an hour every day at home, and I always fall asleep during it. And my parents wouldn't sign the paper. I hated it.

Nia goes on to say that even if she enjoyed the book, the act of being forced to read made her not want to do it at all. These stories illuminate how some well-intended measures to ensure students are reading can actually have a negative effect on student reading enjoyment and cause them to read less, even if they enjoy the book. The perceptions of what a successful reader looks like (which informs self-perception) become more about checking an external box, or in this case getting a signature on a piece of paper, than authentically engaging in reading.

Social Comparisons of Reading Ability

Though the research question sought to understand student perception of themselves as readers, students also spoke of comparing themselves with their peers as readers. This perception of other students as readers informed what students view as a "successful" reader. An example of this emerges within Nia's story. In Nia's ideal world, she would also win reading awards. She has watched her friends be successful in reading, get awards for reading, and one friend has entered and won the Young Georgia Authors writing competition for her grade level. She saw this as something that her friend is really proud of, and a feeling that she'd like to experience as well.

In Marisol's case, she perceived that her friends and other students have the ability to have conversations about reading much more naturally than she does, and this benefits them because they don't have to work as hard to block out distractions. These external affirmations of what "good readers" look like based on what students saw from their peers informed how they perceived reading and themselves as readers. Taken together, Nia and Marisol highlight the importance of peers as one aspect that can inform struggling readers' perceptions of themselves

as readers. Even though these perceptions of others may not even be accurate (an externally confident student may also be struggling with reading, for example), students highlighted the idea that their perceptions of their peers can influence what they believe a "good reader" looks like.

Student Ideal Selves and Perfect Worlds

The emergence of this theme has me both fascinated and reflective. Initially when reviewing themes, I was struck by how rarely students talked about ways they would like the environment or context of reading to change, but instead focused on how *they* should change as readers. In critically reflecting upon my process, I recognized that the framing of the second drawing prompt itself ("Imagine you have a magic wand and could create a perfect world. What kind of reader do you want to be? Draw a picture of yourself as the reader you would be in this perfect world") may have led students to focus on "the kind of reader [they would] want to be" as opposed to their ability to "create a perfect world." Though both pieces are included in the prompt, the direct question is about "What kind of reader [they would] want to be." As such, it is now unsurprising that so many students identified specific things that they would change about themselves given the power to do so. However, acknowledging the effect of the framing, it is all the more interesting to look at those students who did speak about the "perfect world" they would create, given a magic wand.

The section of the prompt that asked how students would change themselves led to various and unique responses from students. For Gustavo, this includes getting better at reading in his head. For Dylan, he would become a "Megamind reader," having tons of books and

remembering everything from each of them. For Nia, she would be more confident as a reader and be able to recall information from the text. For Harrison, "reading in an enclosed area would be more relaxing." For Alondra, in her perfect world, it would just "click." In a perfect world, she wouldn't have as many questions, and she wouldn't have to re-read the text multiple times for understanding. For Marisol, she wants to be able to remember details about stories so that she can talk confidently about what she is reading. Taken together, these descriptions speak to what students would want to change most about their actual selves as readers. In doing so, they reveal students' perceptions of their deficits and what they lack as readers. Though not all students were able to name a time that they felt successful as readers, all students were able to note a way they'd like to change themself in an ideal world.

Interestingly, there were students who did use their "magic wand" to change the world and provide a more suitable reading environment for their reading needs. The most direct in this way was Gustavo. For Gustavo, his ideal world would include more opportunities for students to read out loud and discuss that reading in the reading classroom:

> In a perfect world, reading out loud would happen more so that everyone knows what they're reading. Maybe if we're in a group session where we're reading the same book, we could read out loud together, so we can all know where we are at and all be quicker.

For Gustavo, this is key in his ideal world. Reading silently is what frustrates him the most as a reader, so he would use his magic wand to ensure that students get the opportunity to read aloud and make meaning of that reading with their peers.

Harrison discussed a change he would like to see at the end of his narrative, though it was not included in his drawing. He shared that teachers could help students find their interests, not just by allowing choice, but supporting students in the selection process.

> They let you go out into the library and choose a book, but they don't really explain how to choose a book. They should tell you, 'You should find out what you're interested in or what you're interested in being interested in. And if you can't find a book—maybe talk to them and help assign a book.

For Harrison, interest is a major part of enjoyment of reading, and whether he reads at all. This piece of his story shows that he feels students could be more supported in this area in an ideal world. Alondra mirrored this sentiment when she said that there could be more time and space in the classroom for students to find those topics and genres that they enjoy, which would make them want to read more, both in and out of school.

While telling her story, Marisol also mentioned an external environmental change that she would like to see, though it was also not included in her initial drawing. She stated that she hopes to see more opportunities for visual learning in reading classes, as she feels that much of her experience has been auditory. Because she has trouble focusing, once the audio is gone, she has nothing to reference. Visuals not only help grab her attention, but they also serve as an anchor to come back to if needed. Though this wasn't mentioned until her interview after the drawing, this still serves as an important piece of her story as a reader, as it represents her hopes in an ideal world and moving forward.

In all cases, students were able to articulate what external factors would be beneficial for them as readers and for their reading needs. These needs are as varied as the students and their individual experiences, including assistance selecting personally interesting texts, and most interestingly, the direct opposites of needing the opportunity to read aloud and make meaning with peers (Gustavo) and teachers providing more than audible experiences (specifically visuals) for students who struggle to focus (Marisol). These student stories highlight the diversity of experience and needs our students bring into the reading classroom.

Change of Reading Enjoyment over Time

In each student narrative, students described a shift in reading enjoyment between elementary (k-5) and middle (6-8) school. Interestingly, there wasn't a dominant perspective that applied to all students. Rather, the perceptions were split evenly between a positive shift and a negative shift of reading enjoyment when comparing elementary school to middle school.

The negative shifts from elementary school to middle school centered mostly around classroom strategies and book types, which informed student experiences. For Gustavo, he was allowed the opportunity to read out loud, use audiobooks, and talk with other students in reading groups while in elementary school. This oral processing helped him feel successful as a reader. When moving into the secondary level, Gustavo was asked more often to read silently, an activity that he says causes him to struggle to remember what he has read. According to Gustavo, this overall shift in percentage of time reading orally versus silently caused his reading enjoyment to go down over time. Harrison also reflected this negative shift of reading enjoyment from elementary to secondary. He said, "I read occasionally, but not as much as I

used to." As an elementary school student, he liked to read because he felt like there were more books that he considered thrilling. He also feels like he had more time to read then versus now.

On the other hand, three students identified a positive shift of reading enjoyment from elementary school to middle school. For Dylan, it centered around the content and new types of books that he began reading in middle school. Specifically, he feels like he gets to read "cooler things," such as *The Outsiders* and *The Hunger Games*. In Nia's case, the social interactions of elementary school reading made her uncomfortable. She felt that her experience with reading groups was that of forced communication. Middle school has been a similar experience, but a little more comfortable. "You wouldn't be made to stand in front everybody and read. We still have to talk to each other, but it's more casual. I don't feel like I'm under a microscope." Like Dylan and Nia, middle school is a time when Alondra found her enjoyment of reading.

> When I think about reading, I think about my sixth grade ELA class. That's when I started to enjoy, and I started to actually want to read. I think it was just the teacher that I had and how she made reading fun. It wasn't like I had to do it or a chore...she made it fun.

In all cases, students were able to name specifically what aspects of change increased or decreased their enjoyment of reading from the elementary level to the secondary level. While the students were split on whether these changes were positive or negative, it is clear that there are specific shifts from the elementary level to the secondary level that impact our readers, including both their enjoyment of reading and how they view themselves as readers.

Motivation Increased with "Interesting" Texts

Not surprisingly, one trend that emerged from multiple student narratives is the idea that students were more motivated to read and enjoyed reading more when given the opportunity to read texts that they personally found interesting. Alondra stated it simply when she said, "I mean, I enjoy reading if it's like a topic that I actually like." Marisol echoed a similar feeling as Alondra. "I started one book with a little group that we were in, and I ended up reading the complete series on my own. So if I get really hooked onto a book and it's interesting to me, then I'll get hooked on reading. If I don't, then I'm not interested in reading really." Nia believes that uninteresting books make a difficult task (i.e., reading) even harder. Gustavo had similar ideas, which emerged in his perception-of-self drawing, where he described the "villain" as someone "like a governor... He or she is a very nit-picky person who makes everything mandatory..." The hero, on the other hand, wants people to have free choice about what and how they read. […] Dylan pointed out that as a reader, he is still "just really finding out what kind of topics [he enjoys]." He explained, "…the reason I love Lovecraft is because I love horror movies and stuff like that. So really you just got to find out the things that you like and what you're interested in." Dylan believes that when students are given opportunities to explore their interests like this, "eventually you'll just find yourself going into a rabbit hole of knowledge and information."

Though the idea of "interesting" books and student choice manifested in different ways based on the student and their experiences, it did emerge across multiple and prove to be an important theme among student readers. These students were able to articulate the polarizing enjoyment (or lack thereof) in reading based on whether they view the text as "interesting."

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Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how struggling adolescent readers' story their experiences with reading, and how these narratives reveal or portray their perceptions of themselves as readers in actuality and as an ideal; and specifically, to investigate how they represent these stories and perceptions visually. The drawing exercise provided a unique entry into the stories of student experiences with reading and bridged into conversations of perceptions of self, both actual and ideal. The patchwork methodology allowed students' individual voices to be the center of the research, and across the unique student drawings and narratives emerged six themes (see Table 3 for a description of each theme).

Table 3

Emergent Themes

Theme	Description
Reading as an (inter)personal experience	Some students felt most like "a reader" and enjoyed reading more when it was an interpersonal experience, when being afforded the ability to collaborate and/or read with their peers. Others, however, only felt enjoyment and success when reading was a personal, introspective exercise.

Perceived roadblocks to reading enjoyment and achievement	Students demonstrated keen awareness of what they perceived as roadblocks to reading enjoyment and achievement (e.g., reading retention, distractions, reading as a "chore").
Social comparisons of reading	Students compared themselves with their peers as readers. This perception of other students as readers informed what students view as a "successful" reader, and whether they qualified as "successful."
Student ideal selves and perfect worlds	Students talked about ways they would like the environment or context of reading to change and/or focused on how *they* should change as readers.
Change of reading enjoyment over time	Students described a shift in reading enjoyment between elementary (k-5) and middle (6-8) school, although the direction of change varied by student.
Motivation increased with texts that participants personally deemed interesting	Students were more motivated and found more enjoyment in the reading process when allowed to read texts that they personally deemed interesting.

Discussion of Findings

In the following sections, I discuss and expand on the findings in the context of these themes as well as the specific research questions that guided this study.

Struggling Readers Perceptions and Visual Representations of themselves as Readers

The first research question guiding this study asked, "How do middle school students who struggle with reading perceive themselves as readers and how do they represent these perceptions visually?" The unique design of this study provided multiple avenues for students to share their stories as readers, as well as present and discuss their perceptions of themselves as readers. Through their drawings and accompanying interviews, students shared a wealth of insight into not only how they perceive themselves as readers, but also those factors that shape their perceptions. Because of the uniqueness of each student and each student's story, there is no single answer to how students perceive themselves. Their perceptions do not fit neatly into categories like "positive" or "negative." The benefit of the participants being in their early teenage years is that they are very aware of situations, of their feelings, and of their surroundings. Students placed their perceptions of self within specific classroom situations and settings, which reveals the complexity and contextual nature of perception of self as a reader.

Yet, though their individual stories, perceptions, and experiences differed, there were trends that emerged in several, or in some cases, across all student narratives. These emergent themes revealed the importance of: (a) how students read and within what context, (b) student perceptions of their own roadblocks in reading, (c) the impact of peer interaction and comparison on student perceptions of self as readers, (d) understanding what student "ideal" selves look like from their own perspectives, and (e) recognizing the shift for all participants in enjoyment (positive or negative) from the k-5 elementary setting to the 6-8 secondary setting.

Reading as an (Inter)Personal Experience. Student identities as readers were heavily influenced by the types of opportunities to engage with the text that were (or were not) provided and encouraged at school. Within their drawings and interviews, students mentioned both reading enjoyment and efficacy as being dependent on *how* they read. For some students, reading is an incredibly personal experience; these students prefer to read silently and alone, allowing them to disconnect from the world and "plug in" to a book, which made them feel like more successful, effective readers. Other students enjoyed reading more and felt like more successful, effective readers when reading was an interpersonal experience in which they made meaning of text through reading aloud and discussing the text with their peers.

Though it is unsurprising that students would have different reading preferences in general and enjoy reading in different ways, the students in this study were self-aware of their preferences and could point to specific reasons that they felt like better readers when they are able to engage in reading one way or another. For Gustavo, he knew and articulated the fact that reading silently caused him to feel much less confident as a reader than reading out loud. For him, meaning was made of text while reading aloud and discussing with his peers. On the other hand, Dylan expressed that he felt most like a reader when he was reading silently and alone because he felt like he could really "connect" with the book. In each case, students could point to academic settings where they were no longer allowed to read in their preferred way, and therefore no longer felt like (or identified as) readers. Gustavo mentioned feeling "lost" when he must sit silently and read, which he felt was the expectation often in his reading classes. Dylan,

on the other hand, felt that class was usually social and full of distractions, never allowing him the chance to silently engage and "dive in" to a text.

While students should learn each skill (reading silently and reading aloud to discuss with others), these students' narratives suggest that being afforded (or not) the time and space to read in the way the students prefer affects their perceptions of self, and specifically, self-as-reader. Each student who spoke within this theme put their enjoyment and effectiveness as readers within a situational context. *I am a good reader if... I enjoy reading if...* For the struggling readers in this study, this (inter)personal experience shaped how they view themselves as readers, as well as whether they enjoyed reading in the classroom at all.

Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory may offer important insight into why these instances when students were no longer allowed to read in their preferred (inter)personal context were so influential on their reading identity and perception of self. Specifically, Bandura (1997) identifies four major sources of self-efficacy, of which mastery experiences are the most powerful source (Unrau et al., 2018; Usher & Pajares, 2008). Mastery experiences are when students use "reading strategies that enhance their comprehension and consequently lead to successful experiences" (Unrau et al., 2018, p. 4). The uniqueness of the student stories in this study suggest that students experience mastery differently and within different contexts; however, in all cases, these mastery experiences are important to shaping student perception of self. For Gustavo, he feels success as a reader when he is able to read aloud and make meaning of the reading with his peers. When forced to read silently or "in his head," he gets easily frustrated, doesn't feel successful, and ultimately, doesn't enjoy reading at all. Though this

doesn't represent the way all students feel about reading, Gustavo makes a valid point worth

discussing. Historically, stories were told and passed down orally. Presently, many people enjoy

hearing stories through audiobooks and podcasts, not to mention the addition of visual aids such

as television and live plays. In the realm of reading instruction, Koskinen et al. (2000) found that

"teachers frequently noted additional benefits of having the audio model at home, reporting that

it excited interest and students 'wanted to listen to books again and again'" (p. 32). Additionally,

audiobooks have been linked to positive impacts on student listening comprehension,

pronunciation, and reading motivation (Kartal et al., 2017). Though there are shown benefits of

reading in an auditory way, we often have structures in place in our classrooms that force

students exclusively to read silently and in isolation (e.g., sustained silent reading, or SSR; drop

everything and read, or DEAR). In this way, students like Gustavo do not have opportunities to

have the same kinds of mastery experiences that lead to higher self-efficacy in earlier grades,

when reading aloud and collaboratively was more common.

Gustavo's awareness of when he experiences success as a reader is not unique to him, or

even to students who prefer interpersonal methods of reading. Other students in the study also

described experiencing mastery, success, and enjoyment when reading silently and

independently, but not when reading with others. Students such as Dylan, Harrison, and Marisol

feel most like readers when given the opportunity to isolate and read silently. While their reasons

for preferring to read independently and silently varied from student to student, they all

identified wanting to shut out the world and avoid distractions. For these students, the way that

they learn, read, and think is sometimes at odds with the teaching strategies they've experienced

in the classroom. This is worthy of discussion, especially given that teachers serve an

increasingly neurodiverse students population. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and learning disabilities, which are increasingly common in our

classrooms, are examples of neurological or developmental conditions that grant individuals

diverse (or "atypical") ways of experiencing and understanding the world around them.

Historically, students with these and other neurodivergent conditions have been expected to

adapt to instructional contexts that were explicitly designed for neurotypical learners, resulting in

"differential access to epistemic resources," and limiting their opportunities to experience

mastery in the traditional classrooms (Legault et al., 2021, Abstract, para. 1).

The neurodiversity movement can be defined as, "the idea that people experience and

interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one 'right' way of

thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits" (Baumer & Frueh,

2021). In Georgia, more than 11% of children are currently diagnosed with ADHD, which is

similar to the national average (Centers for Disease Control, 2023). Additionally, 1 in 36

children in the U.S. are diagnosed with ASD. These are just two of countless conditions that

affect students' "ways of thinking, learning and behaving" (Baumer & Frueh, 2021). This is a

significant number of students who are sitting in our reading classrooms, many who, like the

participants in this study, may want to be "good readers." However, these students can be

discouraged by reading practices in the classroom that play into their weaknesses without

leveraging their many strengths. It is important to keep these students in mind when considering

reading modality opportunities (e.g., silent/solitary versus aloud/collaborative). When studying

the influence of oral versus silent reading on reading comprehension in students with reading disabilities, for example, Robinson et al. (2019) states, "Whether students are asked to read aloud or silently may affect their comprehension performance, and therefore the *conclusions drawn from the assessment*" (p. 113; emphasis added). Findings from the current study indicate that similar effects may be seen in students who would not be identified as neurodivergent or neurodiverse, but also benefit from being able to access texts in ways that leverage their strengths and line up with how they process information most effectively. Moreover, these findings give insight into how repeated exposure to mismatched reading contexts (i.e., silently versus aloud) may decrease students' confidence and enjoyment in reading, as well as cause them to develop identities as readers that are far different from their ideal selves.

Similarly, findings from Nia provided perspective on how students can experience anxiety with certain reading activities, such as reading aloud. Nia is a voice that can represent many students who may not have the time or space to share their stories with reading anxiety. This idea of reading anxiety being tied directly to activities such as reading aloud is supported by Taboada et al. (2022), who studied reading anxiety in emergent bilinguals (EB) and English monolinguals (EM). As Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) explain,

> From a behaviorist view, reading anxiety is thought to develop through a process of classical conditioning, as a reading activity (e.g., reading aloud) is initially a neutral stimulus but becomes paired repeatedly over time with unpleasant situations (e.g., negative teacher comments, peer teasing), ultimately producing a conditioned anxious response to reading. (p. 5)

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For Nia, specifically, these unpleasant situations were moments such as being forced to (a) discuss texts with a group of her peers and (b) stand in front of the class and read aloud, both of which made her feel deeply uncomfortable, as if she were "under a microscope." Ultimately, Nia came to associate these unpleasant, anxious feelings with reading aloud. Once students develop this type of anxiety around reading in public or reading aloud,

> The child might relive the embarrassment of fumbling over words earlier in the week, panic at the sight of several unfamiliar words in the passage, sense the teacher's growing impatience, or hear a peer whisper "Hurry up, it's almost time for lunch." As the feelings of worry and alarm mount, and images of worst-case scenarios escalate, the ability to concentrate is seriously compromised. (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010, p. 432)

In this way, the fear of embarrassment when reading in groups actually makes it harder for anxious students to pay attention and remember what they have been reading.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to reading, and students in this study proved that. Moreover, students must learn to read proficiently across various contexts and settings, including both silent, independent reading as well as oral/aural reading and discussion. Therefore, both of these approaches have a place in the classroom, regardless of students' preferences. Yet, the findings of this study demonstrate these students' self-awareness about the contexts in which they have typically experienced success as readers, and how these contexts come to informs their perceptions of themselves (and specifically their efficacy) as readers (Bandura, 1997; Unrau et al., 2018; Usher & Pajares, 2008).

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Perceived Roadblocks to Reading Enjoyment and Achievement. Along with contextual awareness, students demonstrated keen awareness of what they perceived as roadblocks to reading enjoyment and achievement. Marsh's (1986) I/E Model can be applied to these identified roadblocks to better understand where students' academic self-concept may have been affected, including how they perceive themselves as readers (self-image) and how much value they place on themselves as readers (self-esteem). The I/E model suggests that informing self-concept are both internal (dimensional) and external (social) frames of reference (Wolff, 2021). Internally, a student's reading self-concept "is related to one's perceptions of difficulties or ease associated with reading tasks and experiences" (Katzir, 2018, p. 2). Within this model, internal factors also include comparing their performances across subject areas (Marsch & Yeung, 1998). Externally, factors that affect student reading self-concept include peer comparison, teacher feedback, and home factors (Katzir, 2009). This external comparison helps explain the positive correlation between grades and self-concept in each content area or subject (Stocker et al., 2021). Specifically, it predicts that having good skills in one subject (such as math or ELA) would lead to high self-concept in that subject area, but not necessarily in others (Marsh & Yeung, 1998).

In the current study, both internal and external factors emerged as students discussed perceived roadblocks to being successful readers. The I/E model helps explain the connection between factors mentioned in student narratives with student reading self-concepts expressed through their stories and experiences. These specific roadblocks are discussed in the following sections.

Roadblock One: Reading Retention and Comprehension. Findings show that for the struggling readers in this study, reading retention and comprehension were among the most mentioned roadblocks to feeling like successful readers. Though these roadblocks revealed themselves in different ways among students, all the students who mentioned them (four out of the six participants), discussed them in terms of what they would like to improve within reading. This is exemplified by Dylan, for whom the ability to comprehend and retain information is idealized. His desire to comprehend and retain what he reads is revealed in the drawing of his ideal reader self as a "mega mind reader," who consumes all the knowledge and information as he devours book after book. For Nia and Alondra, the ability to comprehend what is being read and then recall that information later is a self-identified source of anxiety. According to the I/E model, these internal frames of reference and the perceived (in)ability to gain and retain information inform student self-concepts, and thus, their self-perceptions as readers. Using Katzir's (2018) definition of internal reading self-concept as being "related to one's perceptions of difficulties or ease associated with reading tasks and experiences" (p. 2), we can deduce that these perceived roadblocks directly represent difficulties perceived by students within their reading experiences. The fact that these roadblocks revealed themselves within the drawings and subsequently in student narratives provide insight into the internal frames of reference that are critical to understanding how students perceive themselves as readers.

By identifying this as a roadblock, students also shed light on the fact that--though they may not say it in the context of the normal day in the reading classroom--they do value reading comprehension and retention and see them as important skills. Given that the participants in this

study were identified as struggling readers, this is particularly important. Sometimes, teachers may assume that struggling readers "don't care" or that they are just "so low." Not only do the struggling readers in the current study care—they're very aware of the skills they perceive as deficiencies in their reading abilities, as opposed to viewing themselves more globally as "bad readers." This is especially important when we consider how much time and effort educators put in to "diagnosing" gaps and next steps for students. These "diagnoses" could come from data or even teacher assumptions, but not always are educators asking the most directly impacted stakeholders—the students. The students in this study were very aware of what they perceived as their deficiencies in reading, which begs the question, how often do we ask our students how they feel about their strengths, needs, and progress in reading? And if we were to ask students more often, would our expectations change? These questions challenge our assertions but are important to ask because of the connection between student perception and reading achievement (Hogsten and Peregoy, 1999; Fälth et al., 2014; Pershey, 2011).

Research strongly supports the assertion that teacher expectations have an impact on student achievement (Babad, 1993; Brophy, 1982; Cooper & Good, 1983; Good, 1987; Jussim et al., Weinstein, 2002) and can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, which is when an initial belief by a teacher, correct or not, is carried out into fulfillment by the student (Weinstein, 2002). Babed et al. (1982; as cited in Rubie-Davies et al., 2006) distinguish between positive "Galatea effects," or "desirable and positive effects, which are the result of high teacher expectations that augment student academic achievement"; and negative "Golem effects which are the result of low teacher expectations that impede student academic achievement" (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006, p. 459).

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Often, when considering teacher expectations, the conversation is framed in a negative way, such that negative teacher expectations lead to negative outcomes. Those are Golem effects and are certainly an important conversation; but equally important—and more promising—is the conversation around Galatea effects. The implications for Galatea effects are that teachers can create positive outcomes for students by having high expectations. In terms of the first identified roadblock, reading comprehension and retention, we do not have the data to compare these specific students' teachers' expectations, as teacher expectations were not a part of the present study. However, we do know that that "teachers' implicit expectations and students' self-fulfilling prophecies play an important role in student academic and social outcomes in classrooms" (Chen et al, 2011, p. 453). One of the ways that teacher expectations present themselves in the classroom is through the feedback provided to students. Hattie and Timperley (2007) found that "feedback can have major influences on self-efficacy, self-regulatory proficiencies, and self-beliefs about students as learners" (p. 90). Taken together, the research shows that teacher expectations and feedback are noteworthy factors when considering student perceptions of themselves as readers, as well as the specific identified roadblock of reading retention and comprehension.

Roadblock Two: Distractions. A unique aspect of teens telling their own stories as participants in this study is the ability to see through their eyes the things that distract them from reading. Four out of six participants in this study discussed distractions as being a major roadblock to their success as readers. The mentioned distractions included social, technological, and home distractions, such as hobbies, family, and work. As students get older, their "plates"

become fuller, and they begin to have to choose how to manage their time. In this case, expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992) provides a useful structure to explain relationships between students' perceptions of themselves and the content or skills they are supposed to learn in both intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts. In terms of distractions, an interesting aspect of value is "cost." As mentioned in chapter 2, "cost" specifically causes students to weigh what they must give up in order to complete a task successfully. For example, a student may believe they need to reread a chapter that was read in school because they do not remember it well enough to complete their homework assignment. However, making the time to reread that chapter may require them to take time away from a preferable (e.g., hobbies, socializing, athletics) or higher priority task (e.g., preparing for a test in another class, going to work). When the cost required to reread the chapter outweighs the perceived value of doing so, motivation for the task will decrease.

Regarding distractions and student perceptions of themselves as readers, students revealed that their reading identity is challenged more and more as they get older and as other identities begin to form. EVT provides a lens to show us why—students must ask themselves, even subconsciously, *is the value of reading worth the cost of giving up something else?* Or even, *is giving up something else* (time in sports, working a job for money, spending time with friends) *worth it to spend time reading*? These questions require students to weigh the value (V) with the cost. However, this is a further consideration when analyzing the expectancy (E) piece. Expectancy refers is students' beliefs about how successfully they will be able to perform on a given task, and it is closely tied to self-concept within the domain of the task (Wigfield & Eccles,

2000). If students believe that they are struggling readers, but are really great at something else, like a sport or a hobby, students will often choose to engage in experiences where they feel more success, control, and a sense of belonging (Archer et al., 2022; Hodis, 2018). Thus, if the students have low expectancy of themselves as readers and/or question the value of spending time reading but have many other options of how to spend their time, it makes sense as to why the students are experiencing distractions and are pulled away from reading, even when doing so moves them farther away from becoming their ideal reader self.

Roadblock Three: Reading as a "Chore." Several students described a roadblock to their enjoyment of reading related to when reading is a "chore." Various types of requirements or mandates made reading feel like a "chore" to students, and they said that it could make them not want to read, even if they enjoyed the book. Generally, reading was coded as feeling like a chore when (a) autonomy thwarting conditions were present (e.g., required number of minutes; requiring parental signature; restrictions on when, what or where they read) and/or (b) there were unclear/arbitrary goals or purpose (for example, the reading log is literally just about the number of minutes you read, but not about reading for pleasure or reading to learn). As mentioned in chapter 2, Wigfield et al. (2016) explain that both an individual's values and expectancies are influenced by task-specific perceptions and experiences. "These beliefs, goals, and affective memories are influenced by individuals' perceptions of other people's attitudes and expectations of them, and by their own interpretations of their previous achievement outcomes" (p. 56). For participants in this study who had experienced reading as a chore, their interpretations of "previous achievement outcomes" were attached to moments when the expectation didn't match

their idea of authentic reading, which should include autonomy in the reading experience (e.g. not graded or evaluated, having choice in what to read, having choice in where to read and for how long), thus creating a perception that they produced less than desirable outcomes as readers.

Both Alondra and Nia cited reading logs as examples of how reading could feel more like a chore than an authentic, purposeful reading experience. Alondra mentioned hating the reading log in first grade, and that she likes reading much more now that she doesn't have to keep a log as a middle schooler. She also expressed her perception of the reading log assignment as arbitrary and lacking clear purpose when she called it "an obligation [she] had to do," as opposed to a more meaningful assignment that either gives her enjoyment or helps her learn. She recognized that reading can be enjoyable and is a valuable skill, yet reading logs do not seem to support either of these values. Nia spoke more specifically about how the reading log reduced her ability to enjoy reading. She explained that when she was required to complete reading logs, said, "we had to read for I think, an hour every day at home, and I always fall asleep during it. *And my parents wouldn't sign the paper*. I hated it" (emphasis added). This is a particularly interesting perspective because, when reading logs were assigned, Nia perceived that the signed piece of paper is what constituted success in reading. After all, her teacher did not require her to go home and enjoy reading in the evening or even report on what she had read. Reading was reduced to a quantifiable product as opposed to a process or skill that these students were continuing to explore. Specifically, multiple controlling requirements – having to read for a full hour and get a signature from a parent – transformed reading into to-do list for which she would

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get a grade. As such, it became more about external validation of having the paper signed than what was gained from the reading.

Research shows that reading motivation is positively correlated with autonomy-enhancing behaviors (Barber & Buehl, 2013; Gutherie & Davis, 2003). Unfortunately, Nia, as well as other participants in this study, experienced the opposite of this effect, as she felt a lack of autonomy in reading; thus, Nia's reading motivation was diminished. Furthermore, Nia felt negatively about falling asleep when reading, since doing so meant that she had been unsuccessful in completing her reading log for the night. Sadly, this also discouraged Nia from continuing to read in bed, which has been found be relaxing and help adolescents get better sleep at night (Howard, 2011; Rhie et al., 2011). Many adults who authentically read for enjoyment fall asleep reading, so this behavior should be encouraged, particularly as opposed to using devices until bedtime, which has been shown to have adverse effects on sleep (de Sá et al., 2023; Maurya et al., 2022). Unfortunately, when reading is a chore, it is separated from many of the reasons that students might otherwise read by choice.

Unanimously, participants said that they were more motivated to read texts that were personally relevant or interesting. However, when reading logs were assigned, even the ability to choose their own books was not enough to make the reading experience meaningful. As mentioned in chapter 2, Walgermo et al., (2018) found that high reading interest was a major contributor to positive reading self-concept, even if emergent reading skills were low. It is compelling to point out that, though these students are considered struggling readers, none of them stated that they dislike reading. Rather, their enjoyment of reading was dependent on

modalities, contexts, text selection, and a feeling of autonomy, rather than reading feeling like a chore.

  Social Comparisons of Reading Ability. Though the goal of the study was to understand student perceptions of self, it was revealed that social comparison of reading ability is a factor that contributes to student perception of self as a reader. This again ties back to Marsh's (1986) I/E Model, as this external frame of reference revealed itself in both Nia and Marisol's stories. These students mentioned various external achievements by their peers that could be considered successes. For Nia, she saw her friends win reading awards. Her perception of what a "good" reader looks like was shaped by the external validation that her friend received as a reader. This sheds light on the importance of how external rewards can impact student motivation and ultimately, their perceptions of self as readers. Students notice what value is placed on external representations of a "good reader," and though external rewards may be meant to motivate students, they can have an opposite effect on student motivation (Deci, 1971; McQuillan, 1997) and student self-perceptions as readers. In Nia's case, she viewed the external award as an indication of what a good reader is, so that *not* receiving that same recognition became one reason she felt like less of a good reader.

  Marisol also developed her beliefs about what a good reader is from observing her peers, but she was less interested in awards and grades and more interested in her perceptions of their actual reading abilities and skills. Specifically, she perceived that her peers can easily recall information after reading, which is a difficult task for her. Social Comparison Theory (SCT) has been used as a staple in the field of psychology to understand the effects of social comparisons.

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Specifically applicable to reading is the idea that "if the comparison target has a higher ability, one's ASC (academic self-concept) will become lower" (Jansen et al., 2022, p. 1542). This can help us understand what Marisol experienced as a result of her observations of peers who appear to recall information from text with ease. There isn't a way to know if Marisol's friends actually recall information easily after reading, but Marison's perception that they do decreases her reading self-concept. Externally, Marisol's peers also have confidence and ease when *speaking* about reading that she feels she does not possess. She assumes this is because of their natural ability to recall information easily, as opposed to the use of reading strategies, work with a tutor, or any other number of reasons a student may be able to speak confidently about something they read in class. Nonetheless, her perception of their inherent ability is a factor in how Marisol perceives herself as a reader.

Comparison of Real and Ideal Selves

The second research question guiding this study asked, "What differences exist between struggling readers' actual and ideal selves?" The importance of this comparison is spelled out in Roger's (1969) humanistic theory, which states that the idea of self can be broken into two parts: the ideal self and the real self. The ideal self is who we want to be, which would include all of our goals and dreams; whereas our real self is who we perceive ourselves to be now. The more closely aligned the ideal self and real self, the stronger and more accurate one's self concept becomes. This is important because having an accurate self-concept has been associated with academic achievement (Chen et al., 2013; Marsh & Craven, 2005, Marsh et al., 2005; Möller et al., 2011; Muijs, 1997; Pinxten et al., 2010; Seaton et al., 2015,). This association has been

explained using "The reciprocal effects model (REM) [, which] predicts a reciprocal relation between academic self-concept and academic achievement, whereby prior academic self-concept is associated with future gains in achievement, and prior achievement is related to subsequent academic self-concept" (Seaton et al., 2015, p. 1). Studies of self-concept and achievement have supported this model as well, such as Mujis (1997), who noted that there are strong predictors between academic self-concept and achievement. In the domain of reading, specifically, Katzir et al. (2009) found that "Children's reading self-concept was positively related to their reading comprehension skills" (p. 268). Taken together, the research overwhelmingly shows the importance of students having an accurate self-concept for their learning, development of reading skills, and ultimately, academic achievement. Inversely, major differences between the ideal and real self can harm self-esteem (Kapikiran, 2011). In the following sections, I discuss my findings in terms of how closely aligned student actual and ideal selves were, and what this may mean in terms of their reading self-concept and related reading outcomes.

Ideal Selves. The ways in which students spoke of their ideal selves as readers were as unique and varied as the readers themselves. Students mentioned that their ideal selves would include traits such as being strong at silent reading, reading often, being able to comprehend and remember everything they read, and having confidence in reading. However, these traits were usually framed in comparison to their own perceived deficits. The "improvements" that students selected speak to what they would want to change most about their actual selves as readers. As mentioned in chapter 4, these selections reveal students' perceptions of their deficits and what they lack as readers.

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When compared to students' real selves, represented by their first drawings, it is noteworthy that every student had ways in which they would want to improve as readers. Some of these you can see visually within the drawings through the use of facial expressions, symbols, captions, and imagery. Others were revealed through the student explanations of their drawings and through storying their experiences as readers. See Table 4 for a summary of differences between participants' real and ideal selves). Rogers (1969) states that major discrepancies between real and ideal selves can cause students to have low self-esteem, and the students in this study had varying degrees of difference between their real and ideal selves. As such, it may be valuable to examine what separated students' current, real selves from their ideal reading selves. For some, like Gustavo, that gap *could* be relatively small based on his drawings and accompanying narrative. Gustavo describes himself as a "good or okay" reader when reading aloud. For Gustavo, simply changing the reading modality can positively (or negatively) affect his academic self-concept. When reading aloud, his real and ideal selves are more aligned, enhancing his self-concept. Likewise, Harrison described similar sentiments related to reading context. He feels most like a reader when he can isolate and be free from distractions. His ideal self would be able to handle reading in distracting environments, but for now, his reading self-concept is affected by the situational context in which he is reading.

Table 4

Participant Real and Ideal Selves

Participant	Description of Present, Real Self	Description of Ideal Self
Gustavo	"Okay, or good at reading, but only when reading out loud."	"In a perfect world, reading out loud would happen more so that everyone knows what they're reading."
	"When I read things in my head, I usually forget the words and forget about the story. Whenever I'm reading out loud, I remember."	"[Better] at reading in his head..."
Dylan	"[Right] now it's really hard for me to focus on reading... [Whenever] I'm trying to read... I'm always distracted socializing."	"Maybe in an ideal world... I could finally be more focused on books..."
	"[I'm] not like a huge reader, but if I'm bored and I don't feel like taking out my guitar and *I don't feel like talking to anybody and I want to be in my own world*... I'll just flip to [an H.P Lovecraft short story] I want to read." (emphasis added) "And so this guy [in the drawing], he's like resisting the fire, and he's just trying to read a comic book. But [the librarian is] trying to tell him to leave, and he's just like brushing it off like 'Don't tell me to leave. I'm reading.'"	"I wanted to be like the like, the Megamind reader, right? ... I've got all this knowledge and stuff, and ... I got stacks of books. And then that library teacher comes back, and she's getting mad because I'm hogging all the books like I'm taking them off of the shelves and stuff. I'm just reading them all, so she's like, 'Sir you got to stop reading. You're getting too smart.'"

ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR REAL AND IDEAL SELVES AS READERS

Nia	"I feel like sometimes when I'm reading, I get confused by it...A lot of the books that I would like don't really match how I like to read them...I feel like it's hard to follow." "I read really slowly, so it takes a while." "I don't feel like I'm under a microscope."	"I guess just understanding more what I'm doing and being able to...I don't know the word... say or recall what I read." She would also like to win reading awards like her friends.
Harrison	"I like to read out in the open. It gives me like a positive feeling because, you know, it's like sunny out and you're feeling good." The biggest struggle for this reader, though, would be noise, as even outside on the soccer field, he could hear other students, which was a little distracting.	"[Reading] in an enclosed area would be more relaxing."
Alondra	"I feel like I'm just an okay reader. If it's an informational text, I usually won't understand it. But I usually understand more when I'm reading fiction, specifically fantasy…. I really like poems...but it's not like I would choose to read over some of my other activities." "I think because I get like very unfocused, and I feel like I was unfocused on the days that she had us read the book, so it just didn't make any sense to me. So I would read it over and over to make it make sense, but it just wouldn't click." "I have a lot of questions that pop up in my head when I read. Sometimes I find it boring, but that's happening less."	"I would like to read more often than I do now. I would like to not like struggle with topics or genres. I feel like I would just want to be an improved reader than I am now." In her perfect world, it would just click, she wouldn't have as many questions, and she wouldn't have to re-read the text multiple times for understanding.

Marisol	"I get so in my head about trying to remember each name and the details that I forget to enjoy the book. That's like a struggle that I've always had."	"It's going to take me a while because right now, I can't get this [ability to recall information well enough to have a conversation about what she read]. In a perfect world, it wouldn't take me as long to get there."
	"[There's] so much going on on phones in such a small period, where you're expecting something new every 30 seconds or a minute, or every 10 seconds that you scroll… *It's so hard to focus on small little details* [in a book] because you've gotten so used to expecting something new" (emphasis added).	"This represents what I said about *wanting to remember details*. Not just in a story, but in informational text or anything as well. Just remembering general information."
	"[It's] really hard to get myself in the zone and get myself into the book... because I have many distractions around me."	She feels like this gets harder as she continues to get older because she has many more distractions than she did as a child. She perceives that her friends and other students have this ability much more naturally than she does, and this benefits them because they don't have to work as hard to block out distractions.

Dylan is another example of a student whose real and ideal self is separated by one major thing—eliminating distractions. Other than being easily distracted, Dylan's language about his real, present self is positive. The person in his real self drawing says, "[Don't] tell me to leave [the library], I'm reading." He mentions his favorite authors, such as Edgar Allen Poe and H.P Lovecraft, and expresses a real love of reading. Perhaps because he genuinely enjoys reading at times, his self-concept as a reader is tied to his (in)ability to avert distractions and "dive in" to a book. For all three of these students, the thing that separates their real from ideal selves is about context. Their ideal selves would be able to enjoy and succeed in reading in their current context in the same way that their current, real selves could enjoy and succeed in an ideal context.

Conversely, some students had real and ideal selves that were separated by more self-directed (less contextual) differences. For Nia, reading confidence was a major contrast between her present, real self and her ideal self. In discussion of her present self, she revealed that like she doesn't understand what she reads, and that reading is difficult for her. She also mentioned how being forced to read makes this difficult task an even harder one. This is a much larger gap between real and ideal self than the previously mentioned "contextual based" student perceptions. Similarly, Alondra said that in an ideal world, she would be a "more improved reader" and not struggle as much as she does now. Her perception of her real self revealed that she felt like she has a lot of questions, gets easily distracted, and things do not "click" for her. Her ideal self, however, is the complete opposite. She spoke of having fewer questions when reading, being able to focus more on reading, and that ideally, things would just "click" for her.

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She also had a perception that genre affects her current reading abilities, but in a perfect world, she wouldn't have to "re-read over and over for understanding," regardless of genre.

Marisol's depiction of her real and ideal self includes mention of similar ideas. She perceives her real self has been easily distracted and weak when it comes to certain genres and "remembering general information" she has read. One major contrast mentioned in Marisol's sentiments that was not emphasized by any other participant is the idea that her present, real self as a reader feels a lot of pressure and anxiety to remember every single detail when reading. She even says, "I get so in my head about trying to remember each name and the details that I forget to enjoy the book." Unsurprisingly, her ideal self was exactly the opposite—not that she would have less pressure on herself, but that remembering every single detail would come easily to her. This is something that she perceived that her peers do much more easily than she does, and she believed that they do not have to work as hard to block out distractions. She directly stated about the difference of her real self and ideal self that, in regard to remembering every detail, it "takes her longer to get there" and it is a lot of hard work. Her ideal self would be able to read, recall, and describe details much more easily than she does now. Interestingly, Marisol wanted her ideal self to get the details easily, rather than removing the internal pressure that makes her feel like she can't enjoy a book without the pressure of easily recalling every single detail, as she perceived her friends do.

For these three students (Alondra, Marisol, and Nia), closing this gap between real and ideal self is much harder than changing context. Rather, becoming their ideal selves would require them to improve in the skills that they presently see as a deficit. Additionally, these

students perceive that their friends "get it" easily, and that things just "click" for their smart friends, which suggests they believe these reading skills are innate, and unlikely to change. Therefore, getting from current to ideal self would be a challenge because, though it isn't the case for almost anyone that things just "click" immediately, the perception that it is inflates students' ideal selves, making their real selves feel more like a disappointment.

Though this study didn't seek to compare genders as a factor in student self-perceptions as readers, the gaps in student real versus ideal selves revealed a surprising and striking difference in gap "size" among genders. The boys revealed smaller gaps between their present actual selves and their ideal selves, focusing primarily on the mismatch between their reading preferences and reading context. For the boys (Dylan, Gustavo, and Harrison), their ideal selves are achievable by changing the context in which they're reading. The girls, however, spoke of more self-directed factors that are internal and thus, more complex variances between their present, real selves and their ideal selves. These aren't gaps that can be filled in a day; rather, beginning to fill these gaps would require intentional, sustained effort over time, and individualized support from educators. These students individually represent the varied experiences of all of our students as readers, as well as how varied the gaps may be between real and ideal self. By taking this "person-centered approach" (Rogers, 1969), we put the individual student at the forefront of the conversation. If as educators, we continue to really get to know our students as readers and people, we can both identify these gaps, as well as consider ways to help close these gaps to raise our students' self-concepts.

How Students Story their Experiences as Readers

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The third research question guiding this study asked, "How do students story their experiences as readers, and how do these stories relate to their self-perceptions?" The students' individual narratives were the heartbeat of this study, and those were represented through student drawings and accompanying interviews.

Like many traditional stories, there was a progression of time and space among the stories of these students as readers. The most noticeable chunks of time outlined by students were their elementary years (k-5, often referred to "as a child") and their middle school years as readers (6-8, students sometimes referred to as "now"). Interestingly, prior research has found that while reading motivation is highest in the early years of elementary school, by middle school, motivation decreases substantially for many students due to a variety of in- and out-of-school issues (Madjar et al, 2018; Malaspina & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Middleton et al, 2004). The results of the current study suggest that every student had some sort of shift in reading enjoyment when moving from elementary to middle school, and the experiences associated with this shift have lent themselves to shaping student perceptions of themselves as readers.

Additionally, the way in which students storied their experiences differed among genders. Context and setting played a significant role in the stories of the male participants. Whether it be in a classroom full of distractions, the soccer field, or a quiet space to unplug, male students storied their experiences with reading enjoyment and achievement as lacking or being achievable with a change of said context. The stories told by female participants, though, were told through a lens of internal, self-directed factors. When comparing their actual and ideal selves, girls were more perceptive of internal "faults," and these drove the way they storied their experiences in the

reading classroom. Though much research around student self-perception supports the narrative that girls have higher self-perceptions than boys in reading/ELA (Eccles et al., 1993; Lynch, 2002; Sagirli & Okur, 2017; Watt, 2014; Wigfield et al., 1997), the results of this study conflict that narrative in that girls revealed deeper, more self-directed discrepancies between their present and ideal selves than boys. This can be interpreted through the lens of Diseth et al.'s (2014) finding that, "Despite better academic achievement among 8th grade girls [than boys], they had lower levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and incremental views of intelligence than boys" (p. 1). Lower incremental views of intelligence refer to implicit theories of intelligence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Students with *incremental* theories of intelligence believe that traits such as intelligence can be cultivated (Davis et al., 2010). The opposite would be students with entity theories of intelligence, who believe that these traits are fixed (Davis et al., 2010). The idea that girls reported lower incremental views of intelligence is of relevance to the present study, particularly in regard to the differences presented between present and ideal selves among boys and girls. Specifically, the boys storied their present and ideal selves in ways that, on a spectrum from incremental to entity, would fall more on the side of "incremental" theory than the girls, such that the differences presented by boys are more incrementally attainable through hard work, a good teacher, and/or being in the appropriate context to learn. The girls, however, storied their experiences through more fixed differences in their present and ideal selves; as opposed to the boys, the girls presented differences that were internal and storied fewer attainable steps to get there (e.g., they would just be better readers, things would just "click," they automatically would be able to comprehend what they read). The idea that students storied their experiences differently by gender was an unexpected finding, and it revealed much about student perceptions

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of themselves as readers; specifically, the perceptions of student real versus ideal selves were situated within deeply held beliefs about what is more often referred to as fixed and growth mindsets (Dweck et al., 1993).

The methodology of this study allowed students to express themselves through drawings and accompanying narratives from the first-person point of view; this provided students the opportunity to speak directly and literally from their experience as readers. Additionally, questions were designed to allow students to think broadly from the third person point of view (i.e., *If your character in this photo is the good guy, who or what would be the bad guy in this story?*). This allowed for clear protagonists and antagonists to be established within the student narratives. Sometimes, students named people as the antagonists, such as Dylan's librarian or Gustavo's "governor...who makes everything, every single little thing mandatory." Other identified antagonists included physical things, such as the weather; and broader concepts, such as distractions. The antagonists identified by the students revealed clear conflicts that the protagonists (the students) have faced within their reading experiences. Across narratives, conflicts included person vs. person, including Gustavo's governor and Dylan's librarian. Person vs. self conflict included Nia's social anxiety, along with Alondra and Marisol's internal struggle with pressure of remembering details easily. Person vs. technology was present in Dylan and Marisol's narratives when discussing the role technology plays as a distraction from reading. In each student's individual way, person vs. society was present in that students outlined ways in which society doesn't align with the way that they perceive is how they best engage in reading, what types of reading are acceptable, and/or what's expected of them as readers. The explicit

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identification of these antagonists and conflicts provided insight into the types of experiences that have led to students developing both their current and ideal selves, and thus, how they perceive themselves as readers.

Lastly, students storied their narratives through a series of metaphors. The design of this study allowed students to use drawings to represent their current and ideal selves as readers. Weade and Ernst (1990) describe metaphors as a "resource for communicating, they take us beyond the particular, the literal, and the moment-to-moment details of everyday experiences" (p. 133). The students in this study used visual drawings to create metaphors that communicated their perceptions about themselves as readers, including their real and ideal selves. One of the most powerful examples is the way Dylan storied his experience through the metaphor of fire in the library. During his post-drawing interview, he was concerned that his fire would be taken literally, and he would get in trouble for drawing it in the library. He went on to explain the idea that the fire represented his love for comic books, as in the modern phrase that something positive or cool is "fire." However, though the fire is all around him, which is a good thing for the reader of the comic, the librarian is seen saying "Sir! Leave the library!" By Dylan storying his experiences in this way and directly stating that "she was worried for my being and wanted me to leave the library because I was reading comic books," we are able to gather that in his perception, the type of text in which he is engages and the way in which he is reading is not valued by the "librarian." In this realm, Botzakis (2009) found that "reading [comic books] was a temporary shelter from worries, a companion when lonely, or a mirror that allowed [comic book fans] to view themselves and the world differently" (p. 57). The mismatch between what Dylan

views as "fire" (comic books) and what is valued by the "librarian" (traditional books), drives the way that Dylan stories his experiences. In turn, the negative messages Dylan hears about comics, which he finds authentically enjoyable to read, affect how Dylan views "valuable" reading and in turn, himself as a reader overall.

Other metaphors used to story readers' experiences included Marisol's tornado inscribed with the words "holy cow"; the sweat beads on the head of the person drawn for Gustavo's current self, along with the furrowed brows and noticeable frown; and Alondra's lightbulb surrounded by words like "questions," "why is this happening," and "boring at times." These metaphors bring to light the struggles that students sometimes face internally when reading, including the feeling of chaos, self-doubt, and stress. Likewise, in a study asking middle school students to use metaphors to describe school, Demir (2007) found that "More than half of the American [middle school] participants perceived school in general and their own school in particular as a wild, crowded, chaotic, boring, painful, controlled, and regulated environment in which students needed to learn how to survive" (p. 100). Similar sentiments by participants in this study reveal that students storied their experiences using metaphors, which revealed some of the negative associations with reading that contribute to their perceptions of self as readers.

Limitations of Findings

As with all research, this study had limitations that should be acknowledged. First, there only were six participants in this study. Though the six students produced multiple forms of data, and closely resembled the demographics of the school, the study could have been strengthened by inclusion of a larger sample. Second, as mentioned in chapter 4, the framing of one of my

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drawing prompts ("Imagine you have a magic wand and could create a perfect world. What kind of reader do you want to be? Draw a picture of yourself as the reader you would be in this perfect world") may have led students to focus on "the kind of reader [they would] want to be" as opposed to their ability to "create a perfect world." Though both pieces are included in the prompt, the direct question is about "What kind of reader [they would] want to be." As such, it is now unsurprising that so many students identified specific things that they would change about themselves given the power to do so. However, acknowledging the effect of the framing, it made it all the more interesting to look at those students who did describe the "perfect world" they would create, given a magic wand. Third, sampling from the beginning was a challenge because there is no single definition of what a "struggling" reader is. For the purposes of this study, I used winter MAP scores. However, this is only one way of defining a struggling reader, which could misrepresent the students' reading abilities as a whole. If the definition of a "struggling reader" was different, it may have captured a different set of students who told a different set of stories. Relatedly, the study would have been improved if I had been able to interview the students a few times at different time points to see if and how their sense of self as readers may ebb and flow over time. Fourth, students were never asked the direct question "How do you feel about yourself as a reader?" or "Do you believe that you're a good reader?" The idea in this study is that those feelings would be revealed through their drawings and accompanying narratives, but I found myself at times wishing that I had been more direct in my questioning so that I could more definitively describe their current perceptions of self as readers. Lastly, considerations could be made for how to improve the process of getting parent slips returned, as this affects the sample size. In hindsight, the research study interest was of struggling readers, so

being invited to a study to talk about reading was not met with much enthusiasm. This required

the students to take the paper home, remember to ask parents to sign it, and then return to school.

As a result, only six slips from struggling readers were returned for this study.

Implications for Practice

Reading Preferences in the Classroom

Given the findings of the study, ELA and reading teachers may benefit from creating

opportunities for students to reflect on who they are as readers, and to share the stories of how

they came to understand themselves that way. This would allow teachers to know who their

students are as readers and as people, thus allowing them to consider intentional, informed next

steps for these students as readers, as well as build meaningful relationships with students. This

is further supported by humanistic theory, in which Rogers (1969) argues, "If the teacher creates

such a relationship with his class, the student will become a self-initiated learner, more original,

more self-disciplined, less anxious, and other-directed" (p. 20). Rogers goes on to say that when

this relationship is created, people begin to drop the "mask" or the false front that they are

putting on in a public place. In this way, authentic conversations can be focused on the real story

of the individual reader seeking growth.

Based on the narratives of the struggling readers interviewed for this study, consideration

should be given to how teachers reach all students, including those who feel more efficacious

when reading independently as well as those who feel more efficacious when reading with

others. Most importantly, knowing who students are as readers would be the foundation to

applying this insight moving forward. Considering how self-aware students in this study were

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when it came to the connection between preferred reading context (personal or interpersonal) and their perceptions of selves as readers, teachers may be able to use fairly straightforward surveys or brief student interviews to identify their students' reading preferences as well.

From there, teachers could consider how to provide a variety of ways to engage with texts, possibly alternating between silent and social/oral reading to reach both sets of students while continuing to promote consistent practice in each student's non-preferred area. Teachers could also provide flexibility and choice within the reading classroom as to how students engage in reading. While it is important to acknowledge the complexity of this planning process (including time and space restraints, which could be a barrier to this model), the use of headphones for audiobooks, co-teachers for taking groups (or silent readers) in the hallway, and/or dividing the physical space of the room between silent readers and controlled-volume social readers could all be ways to strategically provide space for both types of readers in the classroom. This does take additional planning time, as well as classroom management strategies to effectively manage both sets of readers, but the benefit would be providing more opportunities for students to have mastery experiences in reading, thus affecting their sense self-efficacy and perception of themselves as readers.

Distractions from Reading

Given prior research and the findings of this study, it is also worth discussing what reading looks like at the secondary level. Students are telling us directly what is pulling them away from being able to focus on reading—some things within the classroom, such as social interactions with peers; and some outside of the classroom, such as a growth of technology and

students being forced to budget their time with ever-growing demands outside of school. With this in mind, considerations should be made of how to best reach these students when we do have them in class. This is not to suggest that there is any one-size-fits-all approach that will work for every group of students, but knowing who students are inside and outside of class is a good place to start when having conversations. For example, a teacher poll of how many students participate in after-school activities, such as sports, hobbies, or a job could provide insight on whether students have a "full load" outside of the classroom. With that in mind, the teacher could consider the cost and benefits of assigning reading for homework. Is that something that students have the capacity and time to fulfill realistically? If not, what does it then look like within the classroom? How do we capitalize on engagement and eliminate distractions within the classroom? Again, there's no one-size-fits-all approach, but I would offer that knowing how students perceive themselves *as readers* is a great place to start. From there, teachers can make intentional decisions about text selection and strategies, keeping in mind that the end goal is twofold: engaging students as readers, but also pushing students toward mastery of state standards. Though this study didn't focus on engagement specifically, the participants made it clear within their stories that they wanted to read more, wanted to be better readers, and knew reading could be enjoyable. In theory, this group of kids should be fairly easy to engage. At this point, however, the lack of insight into the stories of how they see themselves as readers and how they came to see themselves that way means we may not be using the right strategies to engage them, especially given the number of students who identified distractions from reading that they face every day. Though we will never eliminate the problem of students being pulled from reading by a variety of distractions, we can acknowledge those distractions and have intentional

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conversations and strategically designed classrooms to help our students overcome those distractions. For example, when asked to tell the stories of themselves as readers, the students in this study often pointed to specific, controlling reading tasks (e.g., reading logs) that played a role in killing their enjoyment of reading. As teachers, we look for ways to hold students accountable for their reading so that we can ensure that they are reading regularly. We do this because we care and because we know the value of students participating in reading consistently. However, student stories such as Nia's and Alondra's should cause us to pause enough to weigh the costs and benefits of such a requirement. Given their stories, consideration could also be given to teaching authentic reading habits and strategies.

Social Comparisons of Reading Ability

In addition to reading logs, students also revealed social comparisons as key external factors that influenced their perceptions of themselves as readers. For Nia, the perception of her friend winning an award shows the value that can be placed on external rewards, as well as how it can shape how students determine whether they are "good readers." As teachers, we want to reward students for excelling. Nia provides a look into the mind of a student who didn't receive an award but would like to. She is a student who, at one time, was in the "advanced" reading groups, yet she now is falling below the 20th percentile in her reading scores. This begs the question, what happened? But in the context of social comparisons and considering the dramatic change in her reading level (and self-concept), we also must consider how seeing her friends receiving awards affects her perception of herself as a reader. More broadly, this challenges us to consider how we can validate our students on a more internal, authentic level.

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In terms of authenticity, Marisol's story and perception of peers also becomes relevant. Marisol believes that her peers have a much easier time comprehending and recalling information. Whether or not this perception is correct, we have no way to know, but it's safe to say that not all perceptions that students (or any of us) hold are always 100% accurate (Kistner et al., 2006; Portillo & Fernandez, 2020). This calls to question the benefits of having more open, authentic reading conversations with our students about the real challenges of reading. At the secondary level, students sometimes mask their insecurities in whatever way possible to fit in. So, while they may be struggling, other students view them as confident and capable. Rogers (1980) proposes that being situated in a safe environment promotes personal growth and meaningful learning. Having authentic conversations around the challenges of reading, as well as strategies for overcoming those challenges, could provide a safe environment for students to know that they are not alone in the challenges that they face as readers.

Student Voice and Input

In terms of having an authentic, student-centered reading classroom, another consideration would be to allow students more opportunities to have input on the texts that they read in class. This seems to be the most "low-hanging fruit" for reading teachers to support students in reading motivation, as almost any text could be used for multiple reading and writing standards. This idea of student choice and students being given the opportunity to engage in "interesting" texts could be explored with some additional planning on the front end by the teacher. However, acknowledgement should also be given to some roadblocks to this approach. For starters, secondary teachers teach a lot of students and resources aren't always available as

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readily as we would like. To find a book that each and every student will find interesting, and then have access to that book on demand, is an unrealistic expectation. However, this is not to say that we can't keep student choice at the front of our minds when planning and provide as many opportunities as possible. Independent reading, short stories, and book clubs are all more manageable ways to provide students with some choice and autonomy in reading. We could also learn from Dylan who said that we should not only provide choice, but teach students *how* to choose a book that they may be interested in. This is an important consideration moving forward; the research is too loud to ignore. As the students pointed out, the opportunity to engage in a text that they deem interesting was cited as a major factor in deciding whether or not to read *at all*.

Implications for Future Research

Further research could be done to compare teacher perceptions of struggling readers with the student perceptions of themselves as readers. Similarly, further research could compare the student perceptions of self with perceptions of peers. The results of this study revealed that students hold perceptions of others that affect their own self-perceptions, so it would be interesting to know if these perceptions align or misalign, specifically in terms of perceived deficits. By studying and comparing perceptions, we would get a glimpse into the (in)accuracy of the perceptions that lend themselves to creating student self-concepts. In the meantime, consideration should be given to open dialogue about reading comprehension and retention among teachers and students, specifically students who struggle with reading.

Another future area of study could include longitudinal research for this group of students. The results of this study showed that every student experienced some sort of change in

reading enjoyment from the elementary level to the secondary level. To have captured these students' perceptions as elementary students would've provided outstanding comparative data for this study. Moving forward, continuing to gather the stories of these readers, especially throughout high school, could provide even more insight into the types of reading experiences that affect student self-concept, as well as peeking into student realities to see how their actual and ideal selves change over time.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how struggling adolescent readers' story their experiences with reading, and how these narratives relate to or inform their perceptions of themselves as readers in actuality and as an ideal; and specifically, to investigate how they represent these stories and perceptions visually. By collecting perspectives of struggling readers specifically and collecting these perspectives through means that do not require them to engage in reading or writing itself, conversations can emerge about the types of experiences that lead struggling readers to develop amotivating self-perceptions, as well as how educators can create experiences that may address these perceptions to help increase student reading motivation, enjoyment, and ultimately, achievement.

The results of this study revealed a unique, diverse set of reading experiences among the participants in this study. The narrative piece of this patchwork design allowed students to tell their stories through drawings and accompanying narratives. From those individual stories, there were patterns that emerged across some (and in some cases, all) stories. These emergent themes revealed the importance of: (a) how students read and within what context, (b) student

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perceptions of their own roadblocks in reading, (c) the impact of peer interaction and comparison on student perceptions of self as readers, (d) understanding what student "ideal" selves look like from their own perspectives, and (e) recognizing the shift for all participants in enjoyment (positive or negative) from the k-5 elementary setting to the 6-8 secondary setting.

This study lends additional research in the field of secondary reading, as well as perceptions of self for secondary students. As a result, these findings may encourage us to reconsider what has been the prevailing wisdom about struggling readers, why they struggle, and how to help them. For one thing, clearly every student is different, and therefore may struggle for different reasons. The stories of students in this study have made that clear. Perhaps more importantly though, it speaks to the ways that students' perceptions of themselves as readers may be at odds with how they are labeled in schools, such that the interventions that they receive may not be the best possible option. For instance, could a student such as Dylan be sent to a small group reading class, where all the reading is done collaboratively and out loud? Of course, that's possible, and maybe it would help him. However, what if that was paired with free reading time in school? No homework, no assignments. Just time to read what he wants. This study has shed light on the importance of getting to know students as readers on a deeper level so that we can understand the contextual and self-directed aspects that shape our students' perceptions of self. As such, not knowing our students as readers can lead to misalignment of reading strategies that disengage our readers, and if aligned in ways that are guided toward student strengths, could build mastery experiences, lead to higher engagement, and bridge the gap between students' real and ideal self as a reader.

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Through their stories and with impressive thoroughness, detail, and awareness of self and environment, the students in this study articulated their strengths, weaknesses, things that work for them in the classroom, things that do not, ways in which social media affect reading; ways in which home life, hobbies, and full plates affect reading; and so much more. These students show the value of a person-centered approach (Bandura, 1969), with each unique identity and voice being different, but just as important as the next. Participants revealed just how complex the perception of self as a reader is, with it not being just "positive" or "negative," but situational, contextual, and based on experiences. More than anything, students revealed that when asked, they will tell you who they are, how they became that person, and who they wish to become. More time and space should be provided for students to provide insight, feedback, and experiences in the classroom. From there, adjustments should be made based on student voice. Educators want what's best for students, but we often don't ask the most important stakeholder in the classroom—the student. Let the students speak, educators; they have so much to say!

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Appendix A

MMS School-level End-of-Year Data for ELA from GADOE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

MATHEMATICS

SCIENCE

SOCIAL STUDIES

	Beginning Learner	Developing Learner	Proficient Learner	Distinguished Learner
ALL STUDENTS 100.00% Participation Rate	33.03%	36.72%	26.45%	3.80%
AMERICAN INDIAN / ALASKAN NATIVE Too Few Students Participation Rate	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	Too Few Students
ASIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER 100.00% Participation Rate	5.88%	29.41%	35.29%	29.41%
BLACK 100.00% Participation Rate	37.21%	46.51%	16.28%	0.00%
HISPANIC 100.00% Participation Rate	37.58%	37.42%	22.33%	2.67%
MULTI-RACIAL 100.00% Participation Rate	31.91%	34.04%	27.66%	6.38%
WHITE 100.00% Participation Rate	16.61%	32.60%	44.51%	6.27%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED 100.00% Participation Rate	38.49%	37.85%	21.29%	2.37%
ENGLISH LEARNERS 100.00% Participation Rate	62.10%	27.58%	10.32%	0.00%
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY	62.90%	20.97%	15.59%	0.54%

State-level End-of-Year Data for ELA from GADOE

HOW DID STUDENT GROUPS IN THE STATE PERFORM?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

MATHEMATICS

SCIENCE

SOCIAL STUDIES

ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS   SCORES, TARGETS, AND FLAGS

	Beginning Learner	Developing Learner	Proficient Learner	Distinguished Learner
ALL STUDENTS 99.63% Participation Rate	24.63%	33.10%	34.36%	7.91%
AMERICAN INDIAN / ALASKAN NATIVE 99.73% Participation Rate	22.06%	33.95%	37.11%	6.88%
ASIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER 99.86% Participation Rate	9.00%	17.95%	44.97%	28.08%
BLACK 99.72% Participation Rate	35.26%	36.46%	25.08%	3.20%
HISPANIC 99.78% Participation Rate	30.12%	36.58%	29.03%	4.27%
MULTI-RACIAL 99.61% Participation Rate	19.53%	33.25%	37.77%	9.45%
WHITE 99.47% Participation Rate	15.15%	30.34%	43.28%	11.22%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED 99.70% Participation Rate	33.07%	36.74%	26.70%	3.50%
ENGLISH LEARNERS 99.88% Participation Rate	44.36%	35.60%	18.49%	1.56%
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY 99.19% Participation Rate	59.18%	23.17%	16.95%	0.70%

Appendix B

Reader Self-Perception Scale 2

Compendium 6. Reader Self-Perception Scale 2

Directions for Use

The Reader Self-Perception Scale 2 (RSPS2) enables educators and researchers to gauge how students in Grades 7 through 10 feel about themselves as readers. The scale consists of 47 items that address reader self-perceptions according to four dimensions of self-efficacy (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Students are instructed to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement using a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Information derived from the RSPS2 can assist in devising ways to enhance students' self-confidence in reading and to increase their motivation to read. The following directions explain what should be done to administer, score, and interpret the instrument.

Administration

For the results to be useful, students must (1) understand exactly what they are to do, (2) have ample time to complete all items, and (3) respond honestly and thoughtfully. Briefly explain to them that they are being asked to complete a questionnaire to find out more about how students in their grade feel about themselves as readers. Tell them that they will be reading a series of statements and indicating how strongly they feel about each statement. Note that the task should take 15 to 20 minutes to complete, but that they can take as long as necessary. Emphasize that this is not a test, and that there are no right answers. Tell them that their responses will be kept confidential.

To begin, ask the students to fill in their names, grade levels, and classrooms as appropriate. Read the directions aloud, and work through the example with the students as a group. Discuss the response options, and make sure that all students understand the rating scale before continuing. It is important that students know they may raise their hands to ask quietly about any words or ideas they do not understand. The student should then begin to read each item silently and to circle their responses. When all items are completed, the students should stop and await further instructions. Students who work more slowly should not be disturbed by others who have completed the task.

Scoring

To score the RSPS2, enter a point value for each item number under the appropriate scale on the scoring sheet (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). Sum each column to obtain a raw score for each of the four scales.

Interpretation

The total score for each scale varies because the number of items differs in each scale. Because the Progress scale consists of 16 items, the maximum score is 80 (i.e., 16 × 5). Observational Comparison and Social Feedback each have 9 items, so their top scores will be the same (45), but the 12-item Physiological States scale top score will be 60 (12 × 5). Each scale score can be interpreted by comparing it with the criteria on the scoring sheet. For example, a Progress score between 49 and 73 would be in the average range, whereas scores of 48 or below would be low, and scores of 74 and above would be in the high range. Evaluators should be sensitive to the fact that scores at the extremes of the average range could represent very different results.

Reader Self-Perception Scale

Listed below are statements about reading. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following scale:

SA = Strongly Agree	A = Agree	U = Undecided	D = Disagree	SD = Strongly Disagree

Example:

I think pizza with pepperoni is the best.	SA	A	U	D	SD

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni is the best, circle SA (Strongly Agree).

If you *think* that it is good but maybe not great, circle A (Agree).

If you *can't decide* whether or not it is best, circle U (Undecided).

If you *think* that pepperoni pizza is not all that good, circle D (Disagree).

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is not very good, circle SD (Strongly Disagree).

1. Reading is a pleasant activity for me. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. I read better now than I could before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. I can handle more challenging reading materials than I could before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
4. Other students think I'm a good reader. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
5. I need less help than other students when I read. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
6. I feel comfortable when I read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
7. When I read, I don't have to try as hard to understand as I used to. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
8. My classmates like to listen to the way that I read. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
9. I am getting better at reading. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
10. When I read, I can figure out words better than other students. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
11. My teachers think I am a good reader. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
12. I read better than other students in my class. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
13. My reading comprehension level is higher than other students. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. I feel calm when I read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. I read faster than other students. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
16. My teachers think that I try my best when I read. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
17. Reading tends to make me feel calm. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
18. I understand what I read better than I could before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
19. I can understand difficult reading materials better than before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
20. When I read, I can handle difficult ideas better than my classmates. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
21. When I read, I recognize more words than before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
22. I enjoy how I feel when I read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
23. I feel proud inside when I think about how well I read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
24. I have improved on assignments and tests that involve reading. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
25. I feel good inside when I read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
26. When I read, my understanding of important vocabulary words is better than other students. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD

(Continued)

(Continued)

27. People in my family like to listen to me read. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
28. My classmates think that I read pretty well. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
29. Reading makes me feel good. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
30. I can figure out hard words better than I could before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
31. I think reading can be relaxing. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
32. I can concentrate more when I read than I could before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
33. Reading makes me feel happy inside. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
34. When I read, I need less help than I used to. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
35. I can tell that my teachers like to listen to me read. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
36. I know the meaning of more words than other students when I read. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
37. I read faster than I could before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
38. Reading is easier for me than it used to be. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
39. My teachers think that I do a good job of interpreting what I read. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
40. My understanding of difficult reading materials has improved. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
41. I feel good about my ability to read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
42. I am more confident in my reading than other students. (OC)	SA	A	U	D	SD
43. Deep down, I like to read. (PS)	SA	A	U	D	SD
44. I can analyze what I read better than before. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD
45. My teachers think that my reading is fine. (SF)	SA	A	U	D	SD
46. Vocabulary words are easier for me to understand when I read now. (PR)	SA	A	U	D	SD

Source: Henk, W. A., Marinak, B. A., & Melnick, S. A. (2012). Measuring the reader self-perceptions of adolescents: Introducing the RSPS2. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56*(4), 311–320, figure on p. 315.

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol and Questions

a) Greet the student and re-introduce yourself. Ask students if they have any questions and explain recording process.

    i) Greeting: *Hi _____, how are you today? I'm sure you remember me from your class when you drew your picture about reading. Well, my name is Mrs. McWhorter, and I just wanted to ask you a few questions about your drawing so that I make sure I understand what you drew and why. This will really help me understand how students feel about themselves as readers in our school, so thank you so much for your help with this!*

    ii) Recording process: *We will use Zoom to record our conversation so that I can be completely present in our conversation. I want to make sure I capture and understand what you say*

        (1) Note Taking Process*: At times, I may jot down a few notes to make sure I remember things accurately and highlight moments. Is that OK?*

b) Interview questions

    i. Narrative stories:

        1. *Before we get to your pictures, I'd like to know more about you.*

            a. *What are some of your interests? What do you like to do for fun? (*Rapport building)

    b. *Tell me about yourself as a reader and all of the events and experiences that you have had that have made you the reader you are today.*

        i. If "I don't know"...*Tell me about what reading experience you remember from elementary school.* (Give student time) *Tell me about reading experiences you remember from middle school.*

    c. *Can you tell me about a time you faced a challenge in reading?*

    d. *Can you tell me about a time you felt successful in reading?*

    e. *Other question stems that may be appropriate depending on the direction of the conversation*

        i. *Where were you when...*

        ii. *What led to...*

        iii. *What did you do when...*

        iv. *How did that make you feel?*

        v. *Tell me about the role of others in that situation. Did anyone help you? Did anyone cause additional challenges?*

        vi. *Do you find yourself reading outside of school?*

  ii. First picture:

1. *Tell me a little bit about what you drew in this first picture. What are you doing in this picture?*

2. *What does this picture represent about how you feel about reading currently?*

   a. *Have you always felt this way as a reader?*

3. *Are there any reading experiences specifically that you were thinking of when drawing this picture?*

4. *Let's pretend for a second that this drawing is a character in a story. Do you know how stories have good guys and bad guys? Let's let your character be the good guy. Who or what would be the bad guy in this story?*

   a. *What is your character's biggest conflict/struggle?*

   b. *What events led to this character being where he is today?*

iii. Second picture

1. *Tell me a little bit about what you drew in your second picture. What are you doing in this picture?*

2. *What differences did you include in this picture from the first one?*

3. *Do you ever feel like this, either when you are reading or when you are doing other activities?*

iv. *Is there anything else that you'd like to share about how you feel about yourself as a reader now or any goals as a reader?*

v. *Possible follow-up questions, as needed:*

1. *Can you tell me a little bit more about how you chose to draw*

   _____? Is that from a particular experience?

2. *Can you tell me the general feeling that you wanted to convey in*

   this picture?

3. (In the second picture) *You also included _____. How do you*

   think that would be helpful to you as a reader?

   a. *Is this something you've seen other students do/have?*

4. *What does _____ represent?*

   a. *What makes you feel that way?*

   b. *How long would you say you have felt that way?*

c) Thank student for participating, see if they have any questions for me, and

   conclude conversation

   i) *Thank you so much for participating! Your drawing and explanations are*

      helpful in understanding student experiences at our school. I appreciate

      your time and effort on this project!

Appendix D

Codebook with Emergent Themes and Codes

Theme	Code	Example
Reading as an (Inter)personal Experience	Desire for group reading	"...maybe we could call students to a little table to read about that book and read together so that they know what they are supposed to be doing and what's happening in the story."
	Seclusion and peace	"... get myself into the book. So, but when I do, it's like you're only in the book."
	Personal connection to text	"You're so connected to the world, but you're also connected to yourself because of how much you're just alone."
Perceived Roadblocks to Reading Achievement and Enjoyment	Reading Retention	"I know I read it…But I was in my head so much that I can't remember anything."
	Reading Comprehension	"I guess just understanding more what I'm doing and being able to... say or recall what I read."
	Social Distractions	"Whenever I'm trying to read it, I'm always distracted socializing."

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	Technological Distractions	"...you're expecting something new every 30 seconds or a minute, or every 10 seconds that you scroll. It makes 30 seconds or a minute on a page seem harder to focus on."
	Reading as a "Chore"	"...I feel like it was like an obligation that I had to do it, so I feel like as a little kid I didn't like reading as much as I do now."
	Reading logs	"When we had those reading logs we had to do… I always fall asleep during it. And my parents wouldn't sign the paper. I hated it."
Social Comparisons of Reading Ability	Awards	"This is me winning a book competition. My friend won that—Young Georgia Author's competition. She was really proud of that."
	Ability	"I asked a couple of my friends. They remember things constantly. They remember specific things, and when I ask about it, they can go on a full story about it. They can remember every single detail."
Student Ideal Selves and Perfect Worlds	Focus	"Maybe in an ideal world... I could finally be more focused on books..."
	Reading Aloud	"In a perfect world, reading out loud would happen more so that everyone knows what they're reading."

	Context	"[Reading] in an enclosed area would be more relaxing."
	Retention	"This represents what I said about wanting to remember details. Not just in a story, but in informational text or anything as well. Just remembering general information."
	Comprehension	
Change of Reading Enjoyment Over Time	Reading as work versus authentic enjoyment	"In elementary, we had this reading time where we read our own books and it was a tiny little break from reading. Now, whenever we read, it's always for work or writing something."
	Reading and social anxiety	"You wouldn't be made to stand in front everybody and read. We still have to talk to each other, but it's more casual. I don't feel like I'm under a microscope."
Motivation Increased with Texts that	Perception of reading value	"If I don't like the book, then I don't find use in reading it."
	Perception of task difficulty	"It [an uninteresting book] makes it [reading] even harder."

Students Deemed Interesting	Reading motivation	"So, if I get really hooked onto a book and it's interesting to me, then I'll get hooked on reading. If I don't, then I'm not interested in reading really."