Engaging the Identities of the Talented Reader

by

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A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In the Area of Middle Years Language and Literacy

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

This qualitative research explored the relationship between identity and reading achievement for the talented reader. In this study a talented reader was defined as a student who exceeded expectations on the reading comprehension section of the Grade 7 Fundamental Skills Assessment or who had a grade of A (87-100%) in English 8. This study was situated in the theories and research that explore how identity and motivation are connected to student success in the classroom.

Three female Grade 8 talented readers from a private middle school were the participants of this collective case study. Data were collected through semi-structured interview transcripts and each student was interviewed only once. The three research questions guided both the independent analysis of each case, and the cross-case analysis that identified commonalities and areas of uniqueness. Data analysis revealed that the three talented students' strong sense of academic self-efficacy contributed to their overall identity and success in the literacy classroom. These talented participants also held positive attitudes towards learning, found purpose in their academic endeavours, and were socially motivated to participate in classroom literacy activities. A trend in dropping motivation for learning was noted as these talented readers stated that they were not challenged in their learning and that their learning was not always connected to their personal identities. The three participants desired more choice in their reading and flexibility in the structuring of assignments.

Future research in the area of identity-literacy theory should include more talented students from diverse backgrounds, and the perceptions of others and

observations made by researchers to increase the triangulation of the findings and overall trustworthiness of such studies.

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, for her patience, guidance, unwavering support and keen editorial eye.

Thank you also to Dr. Deborah Begoray, for her continual support and for always challenging me to reach higher.

Thank you to my Supervisory Committee members Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo and Dr. Deborah Begoray, and also Dr. Alison Preece for finding my work of interest and supporting it through continual guidance.

Thank you to the three participants for spending time with me to share their interests as readers, students and individuals; to the middle school that allowed me to interview and give voice to some of their talented students; to my Director who always supported my voice as a teacher in this project and in my professional career.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family, who missed me during family dinners, swim lessons, play days at the park and more story times than I can count. To Eliot, who played with his little sister quietly, while I typed and typed. To Addison, who missed every single baby group and Mother Goose Nursery Storytime at the library, to instead happily play on the floor or on my lap while I typed. Especially, to my husband, Steven Tait, who picked up many of my jobs and lots of my tears. To my in-laws, who had my children for endless play-dates, dinners and sleepovers. And, to my supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, who always helped me see that there was a way through.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"*Everyone should be their own person*," Anna stated in our interview when I asked her if the perceptions of others where important to her. From Anna's point of view, being unique, not "*generic*" exemplified her identity and her identity informed her actions in the literacy classroom. As her teacher I know that Anna's unique identity is, and will always be, different from every other individual who will ever enter a literacy classroom. In order to challenge, connect with, and develop the literacy skills of every individual, educators and researchers need to know the students in their classrooms and the participants in their research as individuals, with their own stories, and their own identities. In order to begin to understand the relationship between identity and literacy, students need opportunities and space to express whom it is they think they are and adults need to listen to their stories. Their voices need to be central to the creation of literacy exercises and curriculum. To begin to understand how these voices can inform literacy teaching, I conducted a study that focused on listening to the voices of three students to learn what I could about the connection between identity and literacy especially for the talented reader.

The Background

The British Columbia Ministry of Education Gifted Education Resource Guide (n.d.) defines gifted/talented students as students with a "wide range of attributes, from traditional intellectual measures to interpersonal abilities" (Who are our Gifted Students, para. 2). Specifically, the Ministry's guide uses Gardner's (1983) work on multiple intelligences, and Renzulli's (1986) work, which concluded that giftedness

often involves an “interaction of three sets of characteristics: above average intellectual ability, creativity, and task commitment” (Who are our Gifted Students, n.d., para. 7). In order to identify gifted and talented students in British Columbia classrooms, the Ministry provides a resource guide which includes “formal testing,” “teacher observations,” and “records for student achievement” (such as portfolios of student work) (Identifying Gifted Students, n.d., para. 4). Similar to many literacy researchers, the Ministry acknowledges the importance of interviews and direct nomination of such levels of achievement by parents, teachers and other peers.

Currently, according to the marks of students on the Grade 4 and Grade 7 Fundamental Skills Assessment, between 10-13% of the student population in Greater Victoria School District #61 in British Columbia is regarded as gifted or talented in reading as these students exceeded expectations in this area of the examination (District Reports, n.d., p. 2). The population of students used for my study came from a Victoria private school; the 2010 Grades 4 and 7 FSA scores of this school placed 89% of the population in the exceeding expectation or talented realm. Throughout this report, this school is referred to as St. Joseph’s, a pseudonym.

Statement of the Problem

A majority of the past research into reading success and achievement has focused on motivation and/or students who are not meeting expectations. This attention seems appropriate due to decreasing trends in student achievement. For example, a three-year analysis of the Grade 7 FSA scores in the Greater Victoria School District #61 reveals decreased levels of reading achievement and little to no improvement in writing achievement (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010,

p. 2). With growing populations of students either not meeting expectations on such assessments or not improving, it seems understandable that there are both political and public concerns surrounding literacy achievement. However, when looking only at such assessments for further research or curriculum development, the talented population of students are often left out and forgotten. Talented students are also overlooked in many literacy research studies on student motivation and underachievement because these studies have been largely quantitative in their methods. Quantitative studies often focus more on answering questions of "how many" or "how often" (Quantitative Research Methods, n.d.). To answer these questions, closed-ended surveys of large groups of people are used and therefore the individual's personal voice is not surveyed or obtained, and often groups of students, like the talented, are not observed or considered. Due to the nature of many of these studies, the multidimensional sociocultural aspects and variables connected with learning in today's classroom are neither addressed nor accounted for. For example, some research has found that talented students, in middle school years especially, are losing their engagement, motivation and even some of their giftedness (Gottfried, Cook, Eskeles Gottfried, & Morris, 2005; Guthrie, 2000; Marcoulides, Eskeles Gottfried, Gottfried, & Oliver, 2008; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005; Reis, Gubbins, Briggs, Schreiber, Richards, Jacobs, Eckert, & Renzulli, 2004). These findings suggest that not only are the underachieving at a disadvantage, but so too are those students who are successful. Therefore, more studies need to be conducted that account for the necessary variables that affect learning in the classroom, while also hearing the voices of the students who learn in these environments.

Purpose of the Study

The assumption in many classrooms and even in literacy research is that the talented or gifted will challenge and/or motivate themselves to do better in the classroom. In reality, and in the research of talented students, this assumption of the talented challenging themselves has not always been founded. Of the 12 third- to seventh-grade classrooms across various districts and socioeconomic levels that participated in the research conducted by Reis et al. (2004), only three classrooms offered differentiation or modifications for talented readers. Reis et al. (2004) found that teachers were educated about and aware of how to make modifications for talented students, but did not because they either experienced pressure in raising the scores of the underachieving students or they experienced difficulties "translating this knowledge into effective classroom teaching strategies" (p. 334). Reis et al. expressed concern about talented students not being challenged in their reading curriculum and suggested that these students may begin to underachieve in comparison to their potential and in turn begin to lose their overall talent. The purpose of my qualitative study was to explore this "largely ignored" area of reading research by providing three talented readers, from a highly talented student population, the opportunity to voice what motivates, engages and challenges them in the middle school English classroom (Reis et al., 2004, p. 335).

Research Questions

To address some of the concerns found in the research by Reis et al. (2004), the individual and their sense of their identity, both inside and outside of the classroom, was central to my research and research questions. Therefore, in my study

identity was defined as one's sense of who they are based on the narratives they tell about themselves. My definition was based on the discursive/narrative theories proposed by Gee (2001), and Sfard and Prusak (2005).

My project was guided by the following research questions; the central question provided an overall focus for the study and the sub-questions guided my interviews with the research participants:

Central Question:

- What is the relationship between identity and reading success for the talented reader?

Sub-questions:

- How do one's personal narratives contribute to one's sense of their overall identity?
- What relationship do these narratives have with one's academic success in the area of reading for talented readers?
- How does the talented reader position one's identity in the literacy classroom?

The sub-questions are subsumed within the central question but explicitly identify three specific aspects that are central to answering the main question and were necessary to separate for organizing the research and data collection. Therefore, in subsequent sections of this project only the sub-questions are addressed, as together they answer the central research question.

Project Overview

This case study used the personal interviews of three students who attended a private school to investigate the strategies talented students used to motivate, engage and challenge themselves in the English classroom. Data collection included a structured interview with each participant, who met the criteria of a talented reader.

Chapter One provided an introduction to the study by briefly outlining the overall background and importance of the study in relation to previous research, and by stating the research questions. Chapter Two presents the theoretical underpinnings that informed the study, including motivational theory, identity theory, and positioning theory. Chapter Two also provides a review of the literature pertinent to this study. Chapter Three describes case study research, the methods used for collecting and analyzing the data, as well as the limitations and strengths of the study in general. In Chapter Four the findings of the three cases are individually discussed, as they link back to the three main sub research questions. Chapter Five provides a cross-case analysis, connects the research findings to answer the main research question, relates the findings to the literature review and provides suggestions for future practice and research. Finally, the project concludes with my personal reflections.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The review of literature is organized into two main sections. The first section addresses the theoretical frameworks that support the research questions and overall study. The second section discusses, through a review of the relevant literature, how the theories of motivation, identity and positioning relate to talented middle school students and readers. Also, how gender is a part of identity is briefly discussed, even though gender was not central to my research questions, to address the fact that only female participants volunteered for this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Central to understanding the relationship between talented middle school readers and their achievement and continued success are the three fundamental theoretical perspectives of motivational theory, identity theory and positioning theory.

Motivational theory.

Educational research that has explored the relationship between reading and motivation has repeatedly found a connection between motivation and reading achievement and success (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Gottfried, Cook, Eskeles Gottfried, & Morris, 2005; Guthrie, 2001; Ivey, & Broaddus, 2001; McCoach, & Siegle, 2003; Miller, & Faircloth, 2009; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005). Research has demonstrated that understanding how motivation and reading achievement/success are related is an important educational goal. Skinner, Wellborn and Connell (1990) stated that engaged students “do in fact earn higher grades, score higher on standardized tests of

achievement, and show better personal adjustment to school" (cited in Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 572).

Motivation, in the context of reading achievement refers to "students' interests, desire to learn, and commitment toward reading" (Guthrie, 2008, p. 99). The focus on reading is important, as it is an essential academic skill; "according to an international report on reading among fifteen-year-olds, interest in reading is a major indicator in scholastic performance" (Guthrie, 2008, p. 17). Therefore, to be academically successful students need to know how to read, and be interested and motivated to do so. Guthrie found that when students were motivated to read they were also more akin to reading consistently and purposefully. As Guthrie (2008) argues, "it is the frequency and depth of academic reading that associates positively and highly with measured reading comprehension" (p. 4). The difficulty with this relationship between what Guthrie (2008) calls "reading engagement" (the will to read) and "reading achievement" (the ability to do well in reading activities) is that two "interact in a spiral" (p. 3). Students who are high achievers are engaged readers; the more they read, the more they are engaged and the higher they achieve. On the other hand, students who are low achievers and who often have low self-efficacy in reading, generally avoid reading, therefore they read less, do not develop the skills they need and continue to achieve below average. These "reciprocal relationships" demonstrate how learning can spiral those who are skilled towards success and those who are underachieving away from success (Stanovich, 1986, p. 380). This behavioural occurrence is also known as the "Matthew Effect" or the "rich-get-richer" phenomenon, Stanovich explained as the "cumulative advantage" which is

"inextricably embedded within the developmental course of reading progress" (Stanovich, 1986, p. 381). Stanovich based his theory of the Matthew Effect from research studies that found "that individuals who have advantageous early educational experiences are able to utilize new educational experiences more efficiently" (p. 381). Often used to explain why the underachieving continue to underachieve, the Matthew Effect is important in the discussion about the talented reader as it demonstrates that continual motivation, engagement and challenge are needed to keep the talented reader spiraling towards success. In light of this reciprocal relationship, it would be easy to assume that if one of these variables were removed (motivation, engagement or challenge) the talented reader could lose their will to read and therefore become disengaged from future reading. A lack of motivation, engagement or challenge in current reading activities for the talented reader could also decrease the development of further skills and knowledge, essentially diminishing the student's talent in reading in future learning. Other researchers, such as Moje and Luke (2009), McCarthey and Moje (2002), and McCarthey (2001) would further develop this argument by stating that the act of reading is to not only develop cognitive abilities, for present and future learning, but to also develop the self. Therefore, if reading diminishes so too does the potential for individuals to develop their identity through experiences with various texts and literacy activities. Herein lies the question of how, and if, identity matters in relation to literacy studies.

Identity/Literacy theory.

Like McCarthey and Moje (2002), many researchers have begun to address the question, "Why does identity matter in literacy education?" In response to this question,

Moje and Luke (2009) coined the term "identity-literacy studies" to describe research that is resistant to a "skill-based view of literacy or to a view of literacy as cognitive processes enacted independently from people's motivations, interests, and other social practices (Street, 1984)" (p. 416). Identity theory is connected to literacy in that currently many "theorists recognize that people's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write and talk about" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 416). Therefore, the acquisition of academic skills in the classroom is no longer obtained through the practicing of these skills but through the "participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts" of learning, "all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and other, identify, and are identified" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 416). In order to understand how students identify themselves, or are identified in the classroom, researchers need to use student voices as the central pieces of data. Hall (2007) observed how the use of students' voices, narratives and self-descriptions of their identities as data is limited because "rarely do researchers ask struggling [or any readers of any level] to speak about the decisions they make concerning texts" (p. 133). In my study, I used participants' narratives as data to understand how the students viewed themselves as a learner and reader, and how their sense of self affected their academic achievement.

Narratives shared about one's identity are important from a socioconstructivist perspective as identity is defined as the narratives people tell about themselves, which are derived from the social groups they belong to, and the internalized "practices, knowledge of and beliefs about the world and about themselves as a consequence of their interactions" (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 228). These internalized ideas about one's self have been identified in the research as being active (in that they are

changeable) and multiple (in that one does not hold just one identity, but many). The malleability of one's many identities are due to the mediation of social groups that one belongs to over a long period of time (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 418). Individuals can take on the perceptions that others have about them and mix them with their own ideas about who they are, which are generally "in flux," especially at the middle school level (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 418). According to Moje and Luke, during the development of identities, students are open to adding or changing the stories they hold about themselves, based on their new experiences, which include their literacy experiences. For example, if students are told repetitively that they are a good student, it is more likely that they may believe that they are a good student and work towards becoming one. Therefore, the development of one's identity in the classroom can and is often linked to their general sense of academic efficacy.

Literacy studies have shown that academic efficacy is connected to one's overall identity, how one identifies him/herself both in and outside of the classroom (Guthrie, 2008; McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Therefore, identity theory in literacy research builds upon motivation theory by investigating the connections among people's identities, their motivations to achieve, their sense of self or self-efficacy, and how these variables are all linked to their overall success as a reader. The connection between identity and academic efficacy involves how the identity of a student is positioned within the literacy classroom.

Positioning theory.

In order to understand how positioning theory connects with literacy achievement, efficacy and identity in the classroom, an important quotation from the

work of E. Benveniste needs to be considered; “It is in and through language that man (sic) constitutes himself as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘the ego’ in reality” (as cited in Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 395). Harré and van Langenhove (1991) argue that the ego, as a sense of self, is the “positioning of oneself” or the self as “taking up” a position, offered by others (p. 395). These positions are located in everyday discourses, which “make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people. Like the subject and object of a sentence” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 395). Also, discourses or conversations are seen as the locations or sites from which the positioning of oneself can be understood by or are told to others (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). Positioning of the self also occurs during “social acts” in social “spaces” such as interactive learning events that occur in the classroom (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 394). Therefore, as students interact, discuss, and “negotiate” ideas around literature, they are also doing so through a discourse that, simultaneously and “strategically positions themselves” and their identities as learners (Vetter, 2010, p. 38). Therefore, literacy research is starting to include an intersection of theories to address not only how texts are read in a class (literacy theory), but also how identities read these texts and for what purposes (literacy-identity theory), and how these identities interact and are developed or positioned during these conversations (positioning theory). For my study it was important to understand how these three theories interact and have been researched in the literature to inform literacy practices at the middle school level.

Motivation and Literacy in Middle School

Motivation in middle school.

As noted previously, research has revealed a strong connection between motivation and achievement, especially at the middle school level. Many literacy studies on motivation have demonstrated that a drop in motivation is specifically and significantly experienced as students transition from middle to high school (Gottfried, 2005; Guthrie, 2000; Marcoulides, Eskeles, Gottfried, Gottfried, & Oliver, 2008; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005; Reis et al., 2005). As students enter middle school many of the structures or systems that encouraged and supported their learning change. According to Guthrie (2008), these changes include "different classes, bigger textbooks, daily assignments, large class size, more competition, and teacher control of instruction" (p. 34). He stated that lessons developed around student choice and interests diminish "just at the age when students are seeking independence and control of their lives" (Guthrie, 2008, p. 34). This "shock", as Guthrie (2008, p. 34) coins it, is "demotivational" for students and is innately linked to an overall drop in academic achievement, especially in the area of reading engagement, efficacy and achievement (p. 34). Guthrie (2008) reported the findings of a survey that followed a group of students from Grade 4 to 8. He found that "in grade 4 about 75% of students [agreed] with the statement, 'I think reading is interesting.' But, by grade 8, about 67%" believed that "reading [was] boring" demonstrating their diminishing motivation to be interested in reading (Guthrie, 2008, p. 111). Although it may be easy to identify that motivation towards reading generally drops once students transition into middle school, it is not as easy to identify the type of motivation that has diminished or the reasons why.

Types of motivation.

With respect to the relationship between motivation and reading, seven types or constructs of motivation have been identified in the research to be central in increasing reading attainment: academic versus performance goal orientation, self-efficacy, external and internal goal orientations, outside of school reading, and student attitudes.

To begin, academic motivation is divided into two constructs: "reasons why individuals behave in the way they do" to achieve a certain goal, and the "belief systems that influence the degree to which goals are pursued" (Wentzel, 1996, p. 391). Two types of academic goals students strive to attain are mastery and performance goals. Mastery goals are related to the "actual process of learning" (Wentzel, 1996, p. 392). Students set and attain goals to develop their overall intelligence: learning for learning's sake. When students have mastery goals for reading they want to "to conquer some content" in the texts and they challenge themselves to do so, outside of what is expected of them in the classroom (Guthrie, 2008, p. 18). In contrast, performance goals "represent desires to achieve outcomes derived from" what is expected of them both socially and academically within the classroom, such as receiving a high grade (Wentzel, 1996, p. 392). Wentzel's research explored the factors that sustain academic motivation and social motivation in relation to overall academic achievement in English for middle school students. Analysis of the data from two surveys given to the same group of students in Grade 6 and then again in Grade 8, revealed that students were most positively motivated to read by social goal pursuits. The social performance goals these students sought motivated them to "adhere to the social rules and norms" that created cohesive discussion groups, which

in turn engaged students in reading activities (Wentzel, 1996, p. 401). Although she found a strong correlation between social goal pursuits in the classroom and academic motivation, Wentzel also discovered that over time one of the strongest predictors of continued engagement and motivation for reading was found in mastery goal pursuits. Mastery goals focus on achieving goals that are related to the "actual process of learning" (p. 392). Students set and attain goals that seek to develop their overall level of learning and intelligence; learning for learning's sake. When students have mastery goals for reading they want to "to conquer some content" in their texts and they challenge themselves to do so, outside of what is expected of them in the classroom (Guthrie, 2008, p. 18). The importance of mastery goal pursuits in sustaining learning may be explained by Guthrie's (2008) findings that often students with performance goal (social goal) orientations seek an extrinsic reward for their performance (p. 18). When the reward is removed or the classroom environment that cohesively worked well together changes, the motivation is also lost. Therefore, although Wentzel found that social goal pursuits were strong in middle school students, mastery goal pursuits prevailed as the most significant indicator of success. Other studies such as Guthrie's have also found that social goal pursuits change and/or fade away with time.

Another problem with a performance goal orientation, such as social goals, over a mastery goal orientation is that performance oriented students will do the minimal work or superficial/surface level work to receive the reward or complete the task (Guthrie, 2008). Therefore, the learning activity is often rushed and students do not have the opportunity to learn the skills the task was designed to teach them. Instead, mastery oriented students look for the "big ideas" in the lessons (Guthrie,

2008, p. 18). Completing the task is part of their goal, but more importantly they want to "comprehend, explain, argue, transform, apply, and write about ideas" they have learned (Guthrie, 2008, p. 18). Therefore, each new learning experience motivates mastery-oriented students to learn more, again relating to the Matthew Effect that one achievement spirals upwards to the next. As new learning increases a student's overall intelligence, the positive experience and consequence also improves student self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy, which refers to a student's belief in his/her ability to effectively "perform" a certain task, is another important variable in increased academic motivation (Guthrie, 2008, p. 75). In her study of middle school learners, Wentzel (1996) found that self-efficacy was "a powerful motivational construct related to the formation and regulation of goal-directed behavior," especially in direct correlation to "goal choice, goal pursuit, and the setting of performance standards" (p. 392). Essentially, if students believe in their ability to complete a task they are more likely to try it or challenge themselves beyond their current level of learning to accomplish it. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to pursue mastery goals over performance goals, which is demonstrated in their willingness to "participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at a higher level" (Guthrie, 2008, p. 75). In contrast, students with low self-efficacy in a specific task, such as reading, usually avoid the task altogether. Avoidance leads to a "lack of reading development, and stunted knowledge growth" which over time can be detrimental to further growth or success (again linking back to the Matthew Effect in a downward spiral) (Guthrie, 2008, p. 66). What is important about self-efficacy in

motivational theory for learning is that it links to the value students place on their learning and whether or not their true motivation for a task is either extrinsic or intrinsic.

All students have both external and internal goals for learning, from receiving good grades and approval (external) to wanting to read more by a favourite author (internal). The goal is to have students internally value the work they do in school because research has shown that having intrinsic value, even for one specific task, can extend into future intrinsic motivation for more general tasks and independent learning (Guthrie, 2008; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005; Wentzel, 1996). The importance of holding intrinsic value for a task, meaning that people get some "enjoyment" from "performing the activity" or that they have "subjective interest" in the task, is that then they are more likely to work at mastering the task or academic skill (Wentzel, 1996, p. 393). However, many students are initially motivated to learn and read by external motivators, such as parent expectations or grades. Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier coined the term "domino effect" to explain the "simplex pattern" that students often follow in shifting from external motivation to internal motivation in academic learning during their late middle school and early high school years (p. 175). During their three-year longitudinal study, Otis, Grouzet and Pelletier sought to discover, by analyzing the data from 646 student questionnaires, how and why transitions occurred between intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation for students as they moved from Grade 8 to 10. Their study revealed many forms of motivation on the continuum from external to internal motivation.

External motivation consists of completing learning tasks for the sake of external rewards or to "avoid punishment" (Guthrie, 2008, p. 107). In order to complete these task students engage in superficial or surface level work, such as memorizing, or rushing through material without having to deeply "process" the learning material (Guthrie, 2008, p. 107). Introjected motivation, the next stage in motivation, is where students "internalize" the external motivations from the first stage as their own (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005, p. 171). Due to the fact that students at this stage have not internalized their academic goals as their own, they often complete them out of self-guilt, pressure or preservation, as they believe the goals are what they "have to do" and not what they want to do (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005, p. 171). Identified motivation is when students begin to internalize their reasoning for completing a goal. With identified motivation, students can identify with a personal value or interest in the goals and therefore complete the goals because the students understand that these goals can be advantageous to them. Once students begin to experience personal gain from their work they reach the final stage of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated students complete the goal not only because it is advantageous to them, but also because they enjoy it.

> Individuals with intrinsic motivation have a positive sense of well-being because their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are being met. Therefore, students who are more intrinsically motivated tend to enjoy school and are better able to handle difficult situations. Also, they tend to have greater engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), better performance (Miserandino, 1996), a lower drop out rate (Vallerand &

> Bissonnetter, 1992), and a higher quality of learning (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987) than other students. Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) found these types of motivations can [also] improve students' mental health. (Guthrie, 2008, p. 107)

In general, Otis, Grouzet and Pelletier (2005) found that as students transitioned from Grade 8 to 10 their academic intrinsic and extrinsic motivation both diminished, at varying rates. The researchers also discovered that as this decline increased, the educational curricular and support "adjustments" for these students to reengage them in their learning also declined (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005, p. 171). Further and more recent research on how this continuum of motivational stages works in relation to reading attainment and achievement also supports the findings by Otis, Grouzet and Pelletier (2005).

For instance, Unrau and Schlackman (2006), in their study of 2,000 middle school students from an urban school, found that "external (extrinsic) motivations were generally unrelated to achievement" (p. 96); findings that were very similar to observations made by Wang and Guthrie (2004) who found that external motivation was "not related to test scores in reading" for middle school students (cited in Guthrie, 2008, p. 109). However, Unrau and Schlackman (2006) found that intrinsic motivation "positively related to and predicted text comprehension" for students in Grades 6 to 8, although the intensity of this relationship varied between various racial groups suggesting possible cultural differences between levels and effects of motivation and motivational types on learning (p. 96). For example, Asian students seemed to have a stronger correlation between intrinsic motivation and text comprehension than Hispanic students (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). In general, the findings from the

research conducted by Unrau and Schlackman indicated that motivation in middle school students decreased as students moved through middle school.

Some research has identified additional factors that help to intrinsically motivate middle school students. Guthrie (2008) explains how “the need for being connected that springs to life in middle school and expands through higher education can accelerate or impede students’ academic literacy” (p. 49). Therefore, the social needs of middle school students cannot be ignored in the classroom. However, especially in teacher centered learning environments wherein students have little choice, control or interaction, the social needs of students are generally ignored (Guthrie, 2008). A commonly used and proven motivational model states that students’ motivation will increase based on whether or not, and to what extent, students’ basic psychological needs (i.e., competency, autonomy and a sense of relatedness to others) are met in the classroom (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 572). Socially, these needs are met through students’ interactions with peers and their teacher. The need for a sense of competency and autonomy has been discussed above as students seek self-efficacy in their ability to perform well within the classroom. Wentzel’s (1996) study demonstrated that a student’s innate need to be related and connected to others, as a social goal, can further academic motivation. As students attempt to achieve social goals in the social situation of the classroom they put effort into being “socially responsive and responsible” which leads “to active engagement in classroom learning activities simply because those are activities that are valued and deemed appropriate by the social group (i.e. teachers and peers)” (Wentzel, 1991b; as cited in Wentzel, 1996, p. 394). The argument then returns to Guthrie’s claim that

motivation from a specific area can generate motivation to broader areas. Therefore, if not academically or intrinsically motivated, the social motivation students hold can be used "to engage [students] in learning activities… [as an] alternative motivation orientation toward achievement" (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Wentzel, 1993; as quoted by Wentzel, 1996, p. 394).

Students' social goals are not limited to their interactions with their peers. In their research on how the teacher-student relationship influenced Grades 3-5 students' motivation, Skinner and Belmont discovered that teachers were also a contributing variable to social motivation. The overall "affection, attunement, dedication of resources, and dependability expressed by the teacher shape the extent to which children feel that their needs are met, not only for relatedness, but also for competence and self-determination" (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 577). Skinner and Belmont found that students need to feel supported, academically and emotionally, by their teachers in the classroom. For instance, when teachers provided "clear expectations, contingent responses, and strategic help" the students were "more likely to be more effortful and persistent" in their learning (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 577). Emotionally, if teachers were "warm and affectionate" students overall felt "happier and more enthusiastic in class" (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 577).

It is interesting to note that teachers' treatment of students were dependent on how they perceived students. For example, if students had "high behavioral engagement" in the classroom (meaning that they showed interest in the lessons and participated), the teacher was more likely to support and treat the students in a way that would increase this engagement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 578). However,

when teachers perceived students as displaying low behavioral engagement they reacted in a way that exacerbated "their initial passivity" causing the students to "withdraw from learning activities" (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 578). Therefore, teachers can play a significant role in either increasing or decreasing student social motivation for learning in the classroom.

Teachers can also affect student motivation by whether or not their curriculum meets individual student needs. In another study on motivation, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) surveyed 1,765 Grade 6 students, in both rural and urban settings, about what motivates them to read. They found that student motivation towards reading was also affected when there was a "mismatch between what students" needed and the instruction they received (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 353). This mismatch was attributed to the fact that often in the classroom and in educational research, students' voices about their perceptions, experiences and needs are missing. For example, many of the struggling readers interviewed by Ivey and Broaddus were motivated to learn, which differed from what is generally reported in literacy research because previous studies did not include student voices; therefore, the 'why' of the data and findings were often not reported or heard. Ivey and Broaddus' found that students were struggling in reading because they were not receiving the support they needed and the students were able to voice their needs through the interviews. In connecting with the identities in the classroom another pattern of disconnect found by Ivey and Broaddus was the mismatch between the types of reading done inside of school and outside of school.

Beyond social goals, research has demonstrated that making a connection between students' outside-of-school and inside-of-school literacies can also be a contributing factor to increasing intrinsic motivation (Guthrie, 2008; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Generally, students claim that inside-of-school reading is to "answer questions" and that outside-of-school reading connects more with who the students really are and what truly interests them (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 354). Research that has focused on students' out-of-school literacies (e.g., Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999) has demonstrated that students do want to participate in meaningful, motivating literacy activities, but they do not always know how to do so within the classroom (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). In their study, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that students most valued time to read independently so that they could "make sense of the text at hand" allowing them to "concentrate, comprehend, and reflect without being disturbed or distracted by some other task" (p. 367). Students also commented that they appreciated "teacher read-alouds as scaffolds to understanding because the teacher helped to make the text more comprehensible or more interesting to them" (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 367). Beyond having time to read, being scaffolded by the teacher and having access to interesting texts, the students "reported that three other factors – self, environment, and people – motivated them to read in the classroom" (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 362). The self, as a motivator, was directly linked to intrinsic goals, whereas the environment and people were more extrinsic motivators. However, extrinsic motivators were also linked to what students reported as their worst reading experiences, such as assigned reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Assigned reading limited choice and was not always 'related' to the students' lives, as Guthrie (2001 &

2008), Deci (1991) and others have argued it needs to be. Out-of-school reading was related to students' lives and therefore their favourite reading option. However, the students participating in the study by Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reported that even when time was given for free out-of-classroom reading, it was an add-on and not connected to their daily curriculum. Therefore, the students believed that out-of-school reading was not valuable in the classroom.

A final type of motivation that has "long been held as an important psychological construct…in monitoring one's level of motivation and intention to read" are student attitudes towards reading (Petscher, 2010, p. 335). Petscher (2010), in a meta-analysis of research into the "mediating relationship" between a student's personal beliefs about reading and his/her overall reading achievement analyzed over 32 studies, which included a "total of 224, 615 participants" and "sample sizes ranged from 11 to 26, 859" (p. 341). The studies included in the meta-analysis all focused on how attitudes, as defined by Mathewson (1994) to include "prevailing feelings about reading, action readiness for reading and evaluative beliefs about reading," affected reading achievement on both standardized and non-standardized tests (Petscher, 2010, p. 336). The purpose of this meta-analysis was to synthesize the research over the last 30 years to create some sort of "consensus on the magnitude and overall importance of reading attitudes and reading achievement" (Petscher, 2010, p. 338). Petscher (2010) found that "the relationship between attitudes and achievement in reading was generally of moderate strength (Zr=.32)" (p. 349). The findings revealed that at the elementary level the significance between attitudes and achievement was higher (Zr=.44) than the middle school level at (Zr=.24). Previous research has suggested that

if students have negative reading experiences in lower grades they are more likely to have “lowered expectations for future achievement,” which may explain the increased “attitude indifference” at higher grades (Petscher, 2010, pp. 337 & 338).

McKenna and Kear (1990), who conducted a survey to compare academic to recreational reading levels and attitudes of over 18,000 first to sixth graders found that attitudes towards reading only decreased as students graduated to higher levels of learning, suggesting that teachers need to be aware of their students’ attitudes for instructional planning (p. 629). McKenna and Kear suggested the use of reading scales such as the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, to discover student attitudes towards various types of reading. They believe that these scales can be used to help further motivate student learning and reading in other areas. Awareness of student attitudes has been argued as important as student attitudes towards reading have been found to “affect both the amount of reading children engage in (Ley, Schaer & Dismukes, 1994) and their reading achievement (Burns, Roe & Ross, 1999; Downing, 1982; Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003; Kush & Watkins, 1996)” (Petscher, 2010, p. 336). Alexander and Cobbs (1994), in their overview of the types of assessments for uncovering student attitudes in middle school and college, argued that negative attitudes held towards reading “may be the single greatest predictor of future reading” (as cited in Petscher, 2010, p. 336), and stressed that more research is needed into types of assessments that can be used by teachers for assessing and inspiring their students’ attitudes towards learning in the content areas.

Levels of motivation.

Although it is important to analyze, discuss and examine the relationship between the various types of motivation and reading achievement, recent motivational researchers have also separated motivation into levels or degrees of engagement. In studying students with high academic motivation, Gottfried et al. (2005) coined the term academic intrinsic motivation or gifted motivation and defined it "as enjoyment of school learning characterized by an orientation toward mastery, curiosity, persistence, task—endogeny, and the learning of challenging, difficult and novel tasks" (p. 173). Within this definition, motivation can be seen as separate from IQ; students could have gifted motivation but not be gifted in intelligence. This rethinking about the role of motivation is important because it suggests that student achievement can be augmented through increased motivation. Therefore, students who are not gifted, but intrinsically motivated can perform and succeed at the same level or even higher than students who are gifted. Teaching students about the potential power of motivation in their learning can be significant in developing "sustained long-term" learning outside of the classroom (Miller & Faircloth, 2009, p. 311).

Marcoulides, Eskeles Gottfried, Gottfried, and Oliver (2008), in their study of struggling to successful middle and high school readers, sought to discover if different levels of motivation could be indicators of current and future academic success. The participants for the study were provided by the Fullerton Longitudinal Study database. The 130 infants who began the study were "assessed in the university laboratory at 6-month intervals from 1 to 3.5 years and at yearly intervals beginning at the age 5 to the age of 17 years" (Marcoulides et al., 2008, p. 414). The assessments were standardized

and tested a broad spectrum of realms of development. The researchers found that between the ages of 9 and 13, 23% to 34% of the students identified as gifted in motivation lost some of their motivation for learning and as a result “transitioned to the intermediate group” of achievement (Marcoulides et al., 2008, p. 419). Another trend the researchers found was that once participants reached the age of 13 all patterns of transition seemed to stabilize in all directions. As a result, through the middle school years, no students moved up in motivation to the gifted group, even though research has shown how motivation can increase achievement (Gottfried et al., 2005; Guthrie, 2008). This finding was explained by earlier findings (Gottfried et al., 2001, 2007), which showed that if students entered “adolescence with low levels of academic intrinsic motivation” it was more likely that they would “face a dual jeopardy” in that they reached an age when motivation generally declines and stabilizes (Marcoulides et al., 2008, p. 422). Therefore, the likelihood of students from lower levels of motivation actually increasing in motivation and achievement when entering middle school is very low. Studies conducted by Guthrie (2009), Gottfried et al. (2005) and Marcoulides et al. (2008) found that upward movement in student motivation occurred only in the low achieving end of the spectrum to the moderate level (and not to the gifted level). In general, students at a moderate level of achievement either decreased or stabilized their motivation in middle school, and those at the gifted end decreased more than stabilized their motivation. This declining trend in motivation during middle school needs more research, as do ways to reverse the trend as explanations for this drop were not explored or reported in Marcoulides et al.’s (2008) numeric results.

Unlike the research by Gottfried et al. (2005), Guthrie (2009), and Marcoulides et al. (2008), the three-year study of motivational changes in 646 students as they moved from Grades 8 to 10 conducted by Otis et al. (2005), included measurements that allowed for the complexity of motivation to be studied over time through a questionnaire. The forms of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation were organized into the subcategories of self-determination (external, introjected), identified regulation, and finally, amotivation, similar to "learned helplessness" (Otis et al., 2005, p. 171). The researchers found that each form of motivation directly affected educational situations, such as dropout rates, and overall learning. Like studies previously discussed (e.g., Marcoulides et al., 2008), the "results indicated a continued decline in intrinsic motivation" and extrinsic motivation, whereas amotivation increased from Grade 8 to Grade 9 (Otis et al., 2005, p. 178). In addition to these findings, the data revealed "strong positive correlations between self-determined motivation (intrinsic motivation and identified regulation) and educational adjustment" (Otis et al., 2005, p. 179). This positive correlation meant student motivation and achievement increased when students valued what they were learning and therefore the learning held some purpose outside of learning for learning sake. A final positive result found by Otis et al. (2005) was that students with strong intrinsic motivation at the end of junior high had a higher chance of maintaining this level of motivation and achievement, even through the transitional changes associated with moving to senior high school.

The data from an earlier study of gifted achievers and underachievers by McCoach and Siegle (2003) were consistent with the findings from Otis et al.'s (2005)

research. In surveying 178 gifted students from Grades 9-12 across 28 school districts, McCoach and Siegle (2003) aimed to discover how gifted achievers differed in the areas of "self perceptions, attitudes towards school, attitudes towards teachers, motivation, self-regulation and goal valuation" (p. 144). Their findings suggested that gifted underachievers, although they maintained a strong sense of academic self-perception, lacked "on the motivational/self-regulation faction and goal valuation factors" of their motivation (McCoach & Siegle, 2003, p. 148). These findings suggested that beyond intrinsic motivation, students needed to find value in what they do at school. McCoach and Siegle (2003) stated that they "believe many students underachieve because they find no intrinsic or extrinsic benefits to school" (p. 151). McCoach and Siegle (2003) also reiterated the importance of exercising caution when making general assumptions about the reasons underlying all students' achievement; each student is unique and without this recognition we cannot solve the problem of "academic underachievement" for every individual student (p. 152).

Self as motivator.

All of the research that has explored the relationship of motivation in reading achievement and overall academic success emphasizes the role of the self as an intrinsic motivator (Guthrie, 2008; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Marcoulides et al., 2008; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Future research, like the study by Ivey and Broaddus (2001), needs to include student voices and identities to better understand the connections between motivation and achievement.

Classroom learning also needs to include what Guthrie (2008) argues as "effective motivation;" motivational activities and materials that are not "segregated from significant content. It is not motivation now and learning later. To the contrary, student motivation for deep reading is likely to develop when teachers fuse self-direction into lessons" (p. 8). Self-direction brings purpose and value. But, self-direction and activities that motivate students cannot be accomplished unless teachers understand and recognize the identities that are developing through the literacy activities they plan and implement. Recent literacy research has begun to focus on student identities and explore how identity theories relate to motivation and achievement, especially for middle school students in the classroom.

Identity and Literacy in Middle School

Identity construction.

Identity-literacy theory defines one's core identity as a "discourse space" (Gee, 2001, p. 111). Therefore, an identity is the space where an individual holds narratives, from the self and others, which are repeated or held to create one's sense of who one is in time and space (Gee, 2001). These narratives come from family members and experiences formed over time, and also from an individual's social networks and institutional labels (Gee, 2001). On varying levels these narratives influence an individual's actions and thoughts about themselves, including how they see themselves as a learner or how they act as a learner in the literacy classroom (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that it is through the repetition of narratives that identities, especially those in the classroom, begin to take shape. Repetition of a narrative about a student's performance in the classroom creates a "self-perpetuating" effect (Sfard &

Prusak, 2005, p. 18). The more the story or label is voiced, the more the student will believe this story and take it on as his/her own definition, story or label. Sfard and Prusak (2005) state that in a positive way these narratives can easily "reincarnate into stories of special 'aptitude', 'gift' or 'talent'"; stories that quickly develop an identity of giftedness or talent (p. 18). However, just as easily stories or messages of failure, inadequacies and perceived laziness can destroy one's overall confidence creating a negative or poor student identity in the literacy classroom. Therefore, the messages and stories constructed in the classroom are intimately linked to the development of a student's overall identity.

Identity and literacy connection.

Identity-literacy theory is timely for the middle school student as McCarthey and Moje (2002) state because:

> Adolescents can be more metacognitive about their practices and in part because adolescents are in between (see Bhabha, 1994) multiple spaces. Whether or not one agrees with the concept of becoming, youth are popularly construed as being between many spaces: childhood and adulthood; work and play; home, school, peer group, and community; romance and sex; popular culture and academic culture; science class, history class, and English class; comic book and Internet; local community and global marketplace. (p. 236)

Since adolescents are in flux, teachers need to be conscious of how their classroom narratives affect the identities of their students. Teachers' literacy activities can help students navigate their way through either the 'becoming' of their identities or as a way to help students try on many different identities to determine which parts of these identities might fit them. This self-discovery or self-construction can be

accomplished through literacy activities that involve discussing, relating, critiquing, creating and analyzing characters and identities found in texts (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Activities such as these have been founded to aid in identity development for the adolescent learner (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). McCarthey and Moje also state that during these literacy exercises, students need to be aware of the various parts of their identity, either their stances as described by Gee (2001), or their actual and designated identities, as defined by Sfard and Prusak (2005). This awareness is necessary as it is through their identity, and its various parts/experiences that students "shape" or begin to "make sense of the world" through the various texts they read (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 228). Moje and Luke (2009) offer five themes under which a connection between identity and literacy can be made: difference, self, mind or conscious, narrative and position. The construction of the self, as being socially mediated and recognized, was discussed in the previous section, so the themes of difference, mind or conscious, and narrative are discussed in this section, with position being discussed in the positioning theory section.

Moje and Luke (2009), like Lewis and Ketter (2008), argue that literacy exercises should encourage students to find difference to focus on "how people are distinguished one from another by virtue of their group membership and on how ways of knowing, doing or believing held or practiced by a group shape the individual as a member of that group" (pp. 419-20). By understanding differences, students can see the parts of themselves that are culturally, socially and/or independently created. For example, the findings from the ethnographic case study by Lewis and Ketter (2008) of five teachers who taught late elementary to middle school grades, demonstrated how

the use of literacy materials such as multicultural texts could challenge students' perceptions of themselves, their values and societal stereotypes. The theoretical approach to literature embraced by Lewis and Ketter (2008) encouraged the students to look for differences between themselves and characters, and to play with trying on new identities to broaden their knowledge about themselves and the world. However, the researchers found that this reframing of character studies was, at first, a difficult task for teachers to adopt. Teachers were often unaware of how they stereotyped identities and how these stereotypes were reflected in the choices of texts (and characters within these texts) they chose and the how they interacted with students in their class.

Lewis and Ketter's research (2008) adds to Hagood's (2002) earlier study of critical literacy and identity production in a high school English classroom. Hagood also argued that texts should be read on the basis of difference to foster identity development. Hagood (2002), through the example of one case study of a high school student named Timothy, revealed the importance of teachers teaching that there is "no inherent meaning" to be uncovered in the texts that students read (p. 255). Instead, Hagood argued that teachers need to scaffold students' understanding of how the creation of meaning from the reading of a text is mediated through one's identity and personal experiences. Therefore, the purpose of identity-literacy studies is to begin to understand the role literature plays in the "interpellation" or disruption of the identities of students in the classroom through the discussions and activities around a text (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 424).

The metaphor of mind or conscious used by Moje and Luke (2009) in explaining the relationship between identity and literacy is derived from the writing of Marx (1969), who suggested that the consciousness is shaped through a relationship with activity and reality. For example a student's conscious narrative of who they are as a student can be changed or challenged by the comment of a teacher. For instance, a teacher's statement that a student is good at writing paragraphs, can "in turn" shape new activities, such as trying harder at paragraph writing, which may lead to more comments or grades validating this new identity, which in turn shapes a new "consciousness" about one's identity as a student; not unlike the Matthew Effect (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 425). Vygotsky (1934/1986) argued "that tool use – which includes language and other symbolic tools – shaped consciousness, or mind" (as cited in Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 425). Therefore the conscious sense of self comes into existence through the mastery of the tools that one needs to understand and express one's self. With the use of each new tool, a new consciousness emerges, eliciting new activities and new tools that again develop a higher sense of consciousness. Others, such as Anzaldua (1987), argue that literate acts, such as reading and writing, are activities that develop the tools necessary for people to begin to create a sense of themselves (as cited in Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 425).

An example of how the metaphor of the mind or conscious of the self affects learning is found in Prusak's (2003, as cited in Sfard & Prusak, 2005) year long case study that investigated the identities and achievements of class of 17-year-old native versus non-native Israeli honours mathematics students. Through the use of interviews and observations Prusak found that non-native students were more successful because

they had a strong sense of who they were and were headed, as they felt that their success in the classroom was related to their future identities. These students consciously "strove towards substantial learning – learning whose effects would outlast the classroom…gauged according to criteria independent of…a particular teacher" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 19). Prusak found that the fostering of substantial learning was made possible because the non-native students had a strong sense of their public and private identities, grounded in cultural values, family narratives, racial identities and personal long term goals. Prusak observed that the non-native students were successful in math because they could articulate their identities and reasonings behind their success. In contrast, the native Israeli students possessed only a general future goal of acceptance into a university and therefore they viewed math as a 'gateway' to the more general goals. The expectations of the non-native students' parents and grandparents also affected the students' sense of identity and purpose. As immigrants, the families felt a sense of urgency and necessity for their children to do well, whereas, the native students' families often stayed out of their children's education. This study demonstrated the significance of being conscious of one's identity and future goals as they relate to students' efficacy and ability to develop a substantial zest for deeper learning. The articulation of these identities came solely through the narratives from the students themselves, their teachers, peers and families, which were shared with the researcher.

Narratives are central to not only how one expresses one's identity to others, but also in how one creates an identity, as an individual and a learner. Sfard and Prusak (2005) argued that, "the transition from an action to a state of being is

accomplished in the stories we tell about ourselves and that others tell about us" (cited in Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 427). Therefore, if a student receives a good grade and others verify this grade by stating that they are smart, the student then begins to adopt this new identity as being smart to their self-definition. These stories also help to create a "designated" self in the future (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 427). A designated self is the projection of what one will be in the future based on the present definition and told stories. Therefore, if stories state that a student is smart, it can be assumed by this student that if they continue the way they have been, their future selves will also be smart, highlighting how changes to identity can occur by the retelling of narratives, to one's self or others.

McCarthey (2001) used a combined life-story and case study method to discover how designated identities are established. She observed and interviewed 12 Grade 5 students (from various cultural backgrounds and achievement levels) over a 5-month period about how their identities were expressed, connected to and constructed through activities in the literacy classroom. Her findings suggested that the motivation to read and be successful were closely linked to a strong sense of identity and the knowing of one's interests. McCarthey (2001) also found that identities were strongly influenced and shaped by the "audience and setting" that surrounded them (p. 142). The narratives provided by "parents, peers, teacher[s] and [the] student" themselves played a significant role in the creation of student identities (McCarthey, 2001, p. 142). McCarthey found that differences between the perceptions or narratives of various sources (such as teachers or peers) and the students' own narrativation of their identities, were often a result of an inconsistency in how students displayed their

public and private identities. For instance, in general McCarthey found that if a student lacked self-confidence in a learning task, it was more likely that her/his public and private identity would not match. Therefore, publically a teacher might see the students as shy, whereas the students saw themselves as weak or not good enough. Due to the students' self-perception of their identity as a learner as "weak," they would shy-away from learning tasks, and therefore not be identified as needing support. The mismatch between their public and private identities led to these students not receiving the support they needed, as it was not recognized publicly and privately they did not express this need. The opposite was true for the talented learner. More confident in their abilities, the talented students generally felt more open about their private identity in public, therefore receiving the support or recognition needed. McCarthey's findings illustrated how the enactment of identities in the classroom can support or take away from one's learning.

The public expression of students' identities in the classroom affects more than just how their teachers may or may not support their student learning. For instance, Hall (2007), through a descriptive case study of three struggling middle school students, sought to understand how students used their public identities to protect their private identities. Over a period of a year, Hall visited the participants biweekly to observe their actions in the classroom, to interview them or to have them fill out questionnaires. Her data analysis revealed that a majority of student actions and choices with texts were most often made as a way to protect or express identity in the literacy classroom. For instance, two students used "silence to prevent their peers and teacher from perceiving them as poor readers" (Hall, 2007, p. 136). Privately, these

students reported to Hall that they were the weakest readers in the class. Therefore, these two students disengaged from any literacy activities that might reveal their true private identity. Hall also found that even when these students knew the strategies they must use to be successful as readers in the classroom, they chose not use them because the use of these strategies would suggest to their peers and teacher that they were poor readers. Silence also worked to support these students learning. One struggling reader reported that if she focused in class and did not chat she could finish her work at school and "promote" herself to her parents "as [being] intelligent and successful" (Hall, 2007, p. 137). Also, by being silent in class another student stated that she could spend time watching others and learn through their actions what she needed to do, especially when completing what she perceived as confusing Science labs. Hall's (2007) findings suggested that actions of struggling students are not always due to "a lack of motivation" (p. 138). Creatively, these struggling students found ways to support their learning the best they could, without exposing their private identity as a struggling reader, while simultaneously promoting an identity they wanted, such as being intelligent and successful. Hall's study underscored the importance of teachers getting to know their students so that they can express, without shame, what they truly need in the classroom to fully support their learning and development.

In conclusion, the studies in the area of identity-literacy theory suggest that identities are constantly being constructed in the literacy classrooms of middle schools. Through literacy activities, interactive discussions and critical readings of texts, these identities in flux have the opportunity to develop and grow. Grade 8 students need to develop a strong sense of self and the voice to be able to express their

identities, as the transition to Grade 9 and its entry to high school calls on students to have a more developed, mature and organized writing voice. Moje and Luke (2009) argue that, “strong academic writing, from the academic literacies perspective, depends on knowledge of self and on awareness of one’s identity enactments” (p. 434). Identity enactments also refer to how one’s identity is positioned within the social environment of the literacy classroom, and how this positioning affects students’ overall learning and identity-development.

Positioning Identities in the Literacy Classroom

Positioning theory and literacy studies.

Harré and van Langenhove (1991) state that, “the concept of positioning can be used as a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role” (p. 393). Therefore, with positioning, the researcher or educator observes the position taken up or expressed by one’s identity in the classroom. The classroom, acting as a discursive space, is where students engage in conversations to locate and create their various identities. These positions are produced through “story-lines” which are self-created or taken from the “story-lines” of others that students can adopt as their own (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 396). Davies and Harré (1990) believe that the positioning of oneself “in terms of categories and storylines” is central to the “acquisition or development of our own sense and of how the world is to be interpreted” (p. 48). Storylines, Lewis (2001) added, are usually developed in accordance “to the expectations of others and the social codes and discourses available within a given context,” such as the literacy classroom (p. 13). The repetition of various positions that students take on in a given context or discursive space informs who students think they are in that space and hence, how they experience

their identity. Therefore, the way identities are positioned in a literacy classroom or literacy discussion will inevitably affect a student's sense of identity, both in and outside of the classroom.

In their definition of storylines Davies and Harre (1990) state that how individuals position themselves also affects how they read the world, including what they learn in the reading of a text. Therefore, the position one takes in a literacy classroom not only influences the development of one's identity, but also how he/she interacts with the materials he/she reads. Through texts individuals can gain new understandings, develop their identities and/or challenge themselves to grow. This view of learning highlights how personal and varied learning can be within any given classroom as one text can evoke various responses and interpretations based on the identities of the readers, their positioning in the context of the reading, and their overall purpose for reading the material.

Although Harré and van Langenhove (1991) outline many modes of positioning, interactive and reflective positioning are most relevant to the context of the classroom in order to understand how the transaction between text and individual occurs through the positioning of the individual. Interactive positioning, according to Davies and Harré (1990), is the positioning of one's identity based on "what one says [to] position another" (p. 48). In contrast, reflexive positioning is when "one positions oneself" based on one's personal narratives (Davis & Harré, 1990, p. 48). Both of these positionings occur during a storyline or conversation, and often are not "intentional" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). Unintentional positionings are attributed to the cultural "storylines" from which individuals belong or their previous

experiences in the certain contexts (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). Davies and Harré (1990) argue that by using the conversation as a "starting point" we can uncover how people "orient themselves" in relation to others and their own past experiences (p. 48). In order to extract positions from conversations, Davies and Harré (1990) state that the listener needs to find and pull out the "autobiographical aspects" of one's speech (p. 48).

The importance of understanding how students position themselves in a literacy classroom was highlighted by the findings of a study conducted by Alvermann et al. (1996). The researchers embarked on an ambitious multicase study, over five sites across the United States working in various middle and high school level classrooms, to begin to develop a broader understanding about how students experienced "classroom talk about texts" (p. 247). Data were collected through interviews to hear the participants' authentic storylines. From this data, Alvermann et al. (1996) discovered that during literature discussions students were more focused on "their relations with each other and their commitment to understanding what they read than on their teachers' actions" or directions (p. 262). Through this study, Alvermann et al. (1996) made "visible" how students sought positionings by negotiating "different roles and relations, rights and responsibilities, and norms and expectations," in social spaces (p. 262). These social spaces created by students were often void of teacher guidelines or tasks, especially if students did not find the assignments engaging. Instead, students led their own reading discussions based on topics that interested or motivated them. Due to the strong similarities between the focus groups across "grade level, academic placement, geographical location and sociocultural setting" the

findings that students were apt at demonstrating an ability to negotiate roles and responsibilities suggested "the power of language in both shaping and being shaped by these adolescents' individual social histories" (Alvermann et al., 1996, p. 263). The study also demonstrated the importance of understanding how individuals interact with peers within the literacy classroom. In these discussions individuals positioned themselves in such a way as to either take up an identity or to express an identity that allowed them to interact effectively. Although positioning theory was not a guiding framework in the Alvermann et al. study, the influence of positioning in their findings demonstrated the need for further research into how positioning theory works in the literacy classroom.

Clarke's (2006) research built on the study by Alvermann et al. (1996) by examining literature circle conversations to investigate further how individuals' sociocultural histories and identities influenced discussions around text. Focusing specifically on gender and social class, Clarke conducted a 3-year longitudinal qualitative study on two focus groups from Grades 2 to 5. Using multiple sources of data collection, including observations, interviews and documents, Clarke observed various examples of interactive and reflexive positionings during the literature circle discussions of the students. Significant to her findings were the gendered positionings of power that emerged. Clarke (2006) found that the girls "by literally speaking for the boys, as well as not allowing the boys to voice themselves…put constraints on the boys' access to discursive power" and placed them as victims of interactive positioning (p. 65). By not allowing the boys to share their opinions or even answer questions asked directly of them, the girls positioned the boys as lacking in power and

voice during literature discussions. The girls had also taken up reflexive positionings that mirrored the positions of their teacher. Within discussions the girls "placed themselves in leadership positions, which enabled them to achieve power through this literacy event," which they accomplished by engaging in "teacher-like behaviours" (Clarke, 2006, p. 68). Clarke believed that these findings and positionings mirrored larger socio-cultural storylines. As the boys moved from Grade 4 to 5 they lost their "literacy power" and in Clarke's (2006) observations found other ways to "access power through disengagement, in reading and writing and discussions" (p. 71). One student responded to this transition in stating, "I think girls have power in their mouths and boys have power in their fists" (Clarke, 2006, p. 71). These transitions in school also seemed to mirror a new transition and alliance outside of school. Clarke (2006) found that many of the boys

> began to understand the contradiction in their community of aligning themselves with both school and labor. As a result, many chose to align power not with school, but with manual power found elsewhere (as in fights, sports, and noncompliance). On the other hand, the girls who struggled in these groups as fourth graders were now able to gain power through the exact situations that had marginalized them earlier. By exploring both working-class cultural storylines and local influences, we can made sense of this shift and what happened in the fifth grade. (p. 74)

Therefore, classroom interactions acted as a site to observe and witness larger sociocultural constructions of identity, positionings of identities, and relations of power.

Yoon (2008) also investigated how classroom interactions could be observed as a site to view larger sociocultural constructions by observing how teachers interactively positioned English Language Learners in their regular English Language Arts classrooms. Over one semester Yoon (2008) collected data to complete a "collective case study" based on the observations of six ELL middle school students from three English Language Arts classrooms (p. 502).

> The findings of this study show that the teachers' pedagogical approaches and their interactions with the ELLs were based on their positioning of themselves as teachers for all students, as teachers for regular education students, or as teachers for a single subject. The teachers' different approaches were connected to the ELLs' different participatory behaviors in the classroom contexts that positioned them as powerful, strong students or as powerless, poor students. Even highly interactive classroom contexts with hidden power relations inadvertently positioned the ELLs as isolated. (Yoon, 2008, p. 515)

Yoon also found that the teachers' positioning of ELLs in the classroom affected how other students also positioned the ELL students. In most classrooms the students mirrored the interactive positioning of the teacher towards the ELL students by either including or excluding these students. The teachers played a central role in creating classroom environments by signaling, through their actions, how certain identities would be accepted and/or positioned in relation to others. Yoon's findings demonstrated the complexity of the social environment of the classroom exacerbated with the inclusion of different cultural backgrounds. Not only were students positioning themselves or taking up the positions offered to them by other peers, they

were also, simultaneously, being positioned by their teachers. To conclude her research Yoon (2008) asked: “If methods do not matter, what matters? Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is a useful lens to answer the question” (p. 517). I contend that further research into the affects of positioning within the sociocultural context of the classroom is necessary to understanding what truly matters in the classroom.

Finally, research by Vetter (2010) demonstrated how positioning can matter and positively influence students’ learning and development. Vetter (2010), in a five-month qualitative study of a Grade 11 English teacher, sought to understand the effects of students being positioned by their teacher as readers and writers. Again, embracing the lens of positioning theory, Vetter (2010) used multiple sources of data to collect evidence of both reflexive and interactive positioning. Vetter (2010) found that teachers “can facilitate (through talk) the constructions of literacy identities” (p. 59). Gina, the focus teacher of the study, was able to help students within the literacy classroom form positive identities by positioning “students from disengaged to engaged readers” (Vetter, 2010, p. 46), “resistant to capable writer(s)” (p. 51), and “as member of a writing community” (p. 55) all through her talk and interactions with students. Vetter’s study also highlighted the connection between a teacher’s pedagogy in shaping her overall methods and actions in the classroom.

In the context of my study, positioning theory was important as a lens through which to understand the positions students either took on (interactive) as given to them from peers or teachers, or expressed themselves (reflexive) in the classroom, and how such positions affect their learning, attitudes, engagement and identities.

Gender and identity.

In additional to the foundational theories of and research on motivation, identity and positioning, a final topic that needs to be discussed due to the population drawn for this study is gender. The three participants for this study were three Grade 8 female students. Although one male student initially expressed interest in the study, he did not follow through with the completion of the consent forms and thus was not interviewed. The research questions do not specifically address gender, however, since only female students were interviewed a brief overview of some general themes in the current research literature may be insightful to the findings of this study.

Research findings of Logan and Johnston (2009), Brozo, Shiel and Topping (2008), and Clark and Foster (2005) have revealed that overall, when compared to boys, girls demonstrate higher levels of engagement, frequency and achievement in reading. In their study of 232 Grade 6 and 7 boys and girls, Logan and Johnston (2009) found that although girls demonstrated higher achievement levels in each of the three areas listed above, including exhibiting “a significantly more positive attitude to reading,” the actual “differences were relatively small” (p. 205). What is significant in the studies that have explored gender differences in the literacy classroom is that differences have been found in how gendered identities are enacted and respond to various activities and texts in the literacy classroom. For instance, the findings from the study by Logan and Johnston (2009) suggested that, “boys’ attitudes in one area are more closely tied to their attitudes or feelings in other areas,” implying that a feeling of success and achievement in one area of reading achievement may promote

positive attitudes and approaches to other areas of reading or literacy achievement (p. 210).

Moss discussing the research and writings of Millard's *Differently Literate*, argued that an exploration of how literature is studied in classrooms could highlight the gender preferences of one group over the other. For instance, often in high school literature classes "the prominence given to specific kinds of narrative fiction and the emphasis on character and personal response" does not match the interests of or engage most boys. Moss (2008) stated that other research adds a further dimension to Millard's (1997) work, such as *Boys, Literacies and Schooling* by Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear (2002). Rowan et al., while recognizing that boys' interests are different, suggest that instead of matching boys' interests in the classroom, teachers should work to transform gendered identities and the assumptions that come along with them through the reading of literature. Also, earlier research by Moss (1999) herself demonstrated that the positioning of genders in the classroom by teachers affects student engagement, interests and success in the literature classroom. In her study of late elementary students, Moss (1999) found that girls and boys responded differently to being labelled as poor readers; girls were "more willing to accept that label" and "boys [were] more inclined to resist" (p. 103). These findings suggest that how identities are enacted in the classroom can also be gender specific. How a talented female reader responds to a certain activity, text or even the label of *talented*, could be specific to her gender.

Although gender was not a focus of my research or addressed in the research questions, these gender studies were highlighted to illustrate that gender can and does

play a role in the identity of students. To what degree gender played a role in the findings of this study cannot be ascertained, but just as race, and socioeconomic factors play a role in these students' sense of identity, so too does gender. Therefore, gender, as well as other aspects of one's identity, should be included in future research on how identity contributes to the success of the talented student. As Moje and Luke (2009), argue the metaphor of "identity as difference is…most often conceptualized in contemporary and popular discourse, with a focus on national, raced ethic, or cultural identities," and I would add gender to the list because this metaphor "focuses on how people are distinguished one from another by virtue of their group membership and on ways of knowing, doing, or believing" (pp. 419-20). Therefore, unique to the group of participants in this study was their identity of difference as being female, mostly Caucasian (except Olivia whose mother was from Tibet), and from educated, middle-to-upper class families. Thus, all attributes of difference that contribute to the girl's sense of identity were fully addressed in this study.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion the theories of motivation, identity and positioning are central to understanding how and why talented readers are successful in the middle school literacy classroom for the following three reasons. Firstly, recent studies have documented a decline in motivation in the middle school years and that such a decline significantly affects student engagement and learning in later years, whether the students are talented or not (Gottfried et al. 2005; Guthrie, 2009; Marcoulides et al., 2008; Otis et al. 2005). Understanding the various types of motivation and how they play a role in engaging students, intrinsically, to learn and succeed, may teach

educators and researchers about what can be done to supersede the decline in motivation to ensure future success for all students (Gottfried et al. 2005; Guthrie, 2009). Secondly, studies investigating identity-literacy theory in the middle school classroom have demonstrated how students are intrinsically motivated by literacy activities that recognize and analyze identity types (McCarthey, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009). The connection between identity-literacy theory and motivational theory for the talented needs further exploration; as these initial studies demonstrate that there is a worthwhile relationship to warrant future investigation. Moje and Luke (2009) argue that current identity-literacy research is, as a body of research, transitioning and bordering on discovering how "deep learning" occurs as well as suggesting that literature may play a role in the development of the self in the classroom (p. 434). Finally, as teachers and students work to motivate, engage and develop the self, the self is always working in position with other selves in the social context of the classroom (Clarke, 2006; Vetter, 2010; Yoon, 2008). These positionings, conscious or not, seem to affect the learning of all students, suggesting that teachers and students should be aware of how identities work within a social sphere, such as the classroom (Clarke, 2006; Vetter, 2010; Yoon, 2008). Perhaps by students understanding how identities work in reality they will be empowered to consciously create and express the identities and positionings they want to hold outside of the classroom, and learn how to create these identities through their inside of school literacy exercises and experiences (Clarke, 2001). Examining the connections among these three theories demonstrates that more research is needed to understand how they work together to

not only engage and motivate all students, but also how they might contribute in creating our future citizens.

In Chapter Three I discuss the methodology and methods used in my study, the research paradigm, and describe how data were collected, organized, analyzed and verified.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Chapter Three describes the research paradigm, the participants and their setting, the methods used for collecting and analyzing the data, the verification strategies, and the limitations and strengths of the study. The purpose of this chapter is to “publicly disclose decisions made during the research process,” thus strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings that are shared in Chapter Four (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 30).

Research Paradigm

Qualitative research, at its core, aims at discovering the “how” and “why” of human behaviour and phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Researchers begin a qualitative study with predetermined “assumptions, a world view, and the possible use of a theoretical lens” that guide how they observe and report on “social or human problems” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Data are collected from the “natural setting” to obtain the “voice of the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Hara (1995) argues that qualitative research, helps a researcher “observe in detail his/her own research viewpoint” (p. 1). In the context of educational research, Hara (1995) argues that the “researcher’s subjectivity is central” and therefore, when conducting qualitative research in education, researchers need to be aware that their “viewpoints and value judgments are deeply connected to the research” (p. 1). Also, and most importantly, the use of a qualitative research approach in education allows the researcher to “encompass interpersonal, social, and cultural contexts of education more fully than the quantitative research approach,” while at the same time providing a “richer and

wider-ranging description than in the quantitative research approach" (Hara, 1995, p. 2). Another strength of qualitative research is that this approach allows for the "psychological dimensions of human beings" to be explained, which Hara (1995) argues is important in the educational context as "some issues are difficult to solve in a quantitative statistical way" (p. 2).

Qualitative research was the appropriate choice for my study as the research goal was to give voice to the often-unheard talented reader (Creswell, 2007). The goal was to create a "holistic" picture of how reader achievement and success is obtained for all readers, including the talented (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). To create a holistic picture I utilized a case study methodology and met directly with participants through personal interviews. The interview questions required participants to draw upon their personal narratives about their reading experiences, while also talking about their identity and how their identity as talented readers was positioned within the literacy classroom. The use of the interview to collect data was meant to address some of the gaps of the quantitative studies, such as Marcoulides et al., (2008), whose statistical findings do not explain the reasoning behind the declining trends in motivation. Therefore, through the use of the interview, I hoped to produce a richly detailed description that would illustrate the uniqueness of each participant. Detailed description is necessary as one's overall identity can have many different parts or separate identities (e.g., public versus private identity) and a statistical analysis may not accurately highlight these parts and/or how they interact or are enacted within a student's learning environment.

Case Study Research

Baxter and Jack (2008) state that the case study approach is grounded in a "constructivist paradigm" (p. 545). A constructivist paradigm emphasizes that the "subjective human creation of meaning" is worth researching and understanding (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). According to Yin (2009) the case study approach "is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (p. 4). Therefore, the case study approach is used to ascertain or "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" as they happen in these various situations by collecting stories from participants that reveal their subjective realities (Yin, 2009, p. 4). In the realm of education and literacy research, case studies are used to present data on the subjective workings and realities of classrooms, learning environments and the participants within them (Barone, 2011, p. 7). For my research, I chose a case study approach as I wanted to gather participants' personal descriptions about their identity and literacy experiences related to reading. My overall goal through this "exploratory" process was "to identify themes or categories of behavior and events rather than prove relationships or test hypotheses" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 16).

On a more specific level, Barone (2011), drawing upon the work of Merriam (1988), stated that case studies have five general characteristics. First, case studies are a "bounded system" in that each case contains or does not contain certain participants and/or attributes (Barone, 2011, p. 8). For example, a person, a class or a school can be a case, with its own set of unique attributes. Secondly, Barone (2011) argues that case studies must be "particularistic" in that the case has a "particular situation, program,

event, phenomenon, or person" (p. 8). Case studies also must be "descriptive," in that the reporting of the findings is abundant in detail (Barone, 2011, p. 8). Furthermore, the findings from a case study must also be "heuristic" in that they advance a reader's thinking, while at the same time insuring "inductive[ness]" in that the understandings gained from the research come directly from the data that were gathered (Barone, 2011, p. 8).

My research met with all five characteristics described above, as the study was bounded to three Grade 8 students from one private middle school. The particularistic nature of the study, beyond being bounded to a specific school, was that the participants were talented middle school readers. The findings, as reported in Chapter Four, are descriptive in detail, based on each participant's interview data. The heuristic goal of this research was to share what I learned from these students with others, but also to further my own understanding of how talented readers operate and experience the Grade 8 literacy classroom in this specific school context.

In addition to these characteristics, Stake (2005) identifies three types of case studies that vary depending on the purpose of the research. Researchers use intrinsic case studies when they want to focus on a single case that is unique and of interest to them. The case therefore becomes the central focus of the research, which is not meant to further theory development, but to share a narrative or explanation about this unique case. In contrast, researchers use instrumental case studies when they want to examine an issue, over a case, so that the findings may help to further develop a theory. And finally, researchers use collective case studies when more than one instrumental case is researched, so that the findings may be replicated and therefore further the

understanding of a theory, population or event/phenomenon (Barone, 2011). Often, collective or multiple case studies are used because the reoccurrence of data across cases enables researchers to create a stronger argument to support their findings. However, others have argued that the replication of results takes the place of rich descriptions found in single case studies (Barone, 2011).

A small collective case study approach was used in this case study, as three Grade 8 students were interviewed to study the phenomenon of how identity works to inform or affect their reading achievement. A collective case study approach was appropriate as my purpose was to explore the similarities and differences between three talented readers' experiences during their middle years, at a specific private school. The goals of this study were to provide further insight into the lives and learning environments of talented middle school readers.

A case study research design includes a series of steps for researchers to follow to ensure that data are obtained and analyzed carefully. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) suggest a series of "stages" for conducting case study research that include the following: setting the stage, determining what is known, selecting a design, gathering information from interviewees, gathering information for observations, gathering information from documents, summarizing and interpreting the gathered data, reporting then confirming the findings, and finally preparing to disseminate the case study research. I followed all of the above "stages" except I did not gather secondary sources of data such as, observations, and documents (due to the nature of my research).

Securing Participants

Upon approval from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethic Committee (see Appendix A), I met with the Director of the middle school to gain permission to conduct my study. I outlined my research goals, reviewed my research material and explained the research process, including the requirements of the participants. After consent was obtained from the Director (see Appendix B), the Administrative Assistant to the Director sent my "Invitation to Participate" email (see Appendix C) to all of the Grade 8 students. The invitation outlined the research project and the criteria for participation, and included copies of all research material (see Appendix C, D, E & F). Students were asked to reply to the Administrative Assistant if they wanted to participate in the study or needed further information. Although four students expressed interest in participating in the study, only three students and their parents completed the consent forms. The students either dropped off these documents at the office or brought them to the interview (see Appendix D & E). I corresponded with students through email to set up interview times at the school during non-instructional hours. The student participants were encouraged to read through the interview questions before their interview and to ask for clarification about any questions before we met (see Appendix F). None of the participants or their parents had any questions either before or after the interviews.

Participants and Setting

All participants in this study came from the same urban private middle school. Each Grade 8 participant met the criteria of a 'talented reader' outlined in Chapter One. All three volunteer participants were female. Anna (all names are pseudonyms)

had been a student at the private school since Grade 1, Olivia began attending the school in Grade 6. Both Anna and Olivia were day students. Sophia was in her first year at the school and was a boarder.

I chose Grade 8 students for the project because they completed the FSA the previous year so their scores could be used as evidence of their talented abilities as readers. More importantly, I chose Grade 8 students as these students are at the end of their middle school careers and have more insight and experiences with reading at the middle school level, which was important to this study because I was interested in learning about the transition in motivation and engagement towards reading for talented readers.

The urban private middle school the participants attend is part of a larger private school, which also has a junior and senior campus. Students who attend this school pay a yearly tuition. A boarding community of 250 International and Canadian students are introduced at Grade 8 and this group of students continues until Grade 12. Most of the families who enrol their children at this private school are from a middle to upper socio-economic class.

I was a former teacher of two of the participants when they were in Grade 7. Although I was on maternity leave when I conducted the study, I was aware that my relationship with these two participants might affect the findings. In order to avoid power-over issues with these students, the students and parents were explicitly informed that their participation in this study would in no way affect the students' academic career at the school, as I was no longer in a position to assess these girls. They were also assured that the information shared during the interviews was

completely confidential and would not be shared with fellow students or their current teachers.

Researcher's Stance

As I conducted my research I was also aware that I was a former teacher of two of these students. As a teacher returning to the middle school the next year, I also had my own "research viewpoint," as Hara (1995) would argue, as I wanted to learn from these students. I believed that my future practice could be improved by discovering what did and did not engage talented readers in their literacy classrooms. I acknowledge that this focus may have influenced how I interviewed the students and the data that I gathered. Discrepancies between the two participants whom I had formerly taught and the student new to the school, in their overall openness to express and share narratives, may have been due to my previous relationship with two of the students and this aspect is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was interviews, a common choice for case study research (Creswell, 2007). The interviews allowed for the voice of the students to be the central focus of the study.

Qualitative interviews.

In today's modern society interviewing has become "one of the most common and most powerful [methods] we use to understand our fellow human beings" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 361). For instance, interviewing as a technique dominates popular media. From Oprah to 60 Minutes, interview questions ask the how and why to uncover the complicatedness of human existence. Qualitative researchers use interviews for the

same means, but with a more prescribed approach, as questions asked are meant to assist in gathering data to answer larger research questions.

Fundamental principles.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that researchers and interviewers need to be aware of the foundational elements that exist in all interviews, which they describe as "guiding themes" (p. 19). These themes include understanding the culture of the respondents and how key aspects of their culture impact the overall interview, and being aware of the active role the interviewer takes within the interaction of the interview and in the selection of respondents. Finally, researchers must be fully aware of and recognize how their underlying philosophical assumptions and approaches influence their ability to plan, ask, understand and interpret the data gathered during interviews. "How we interview depends, in part, on what it is we are trying to hear" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 19).

The purpose of the interview, from the point of view of a qualitative researcher, is to undercover meaning "through interaction that is not standardized from place to place or person to person" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 31). However, a researcher can embrace many approaches to uncover meaning through an interview, from a positivist to a critical stance. For my study I adopted an interpretative approach, which looks at "how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives" to figure out what these understandings mean (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 34). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), the "interpretative social researcher emphasizes the complexity of human life" and gathers "detailed descriptions of the cultural and topical arenas" (p. 35) of participants in order to understand the complexities of the respondents' worlds. At the same time, Rubin and

Rubin argue that understanding the respondents' culture can be difficult if the interviewer is not a part of this culture. When I did not understand what the three girls were referring to I asked for further details. However, I found that being a former teacher in the school was advantageous as I was a part of and familiar with the educational culture.

Types of data.

The goal of researchers is to collect data about their research question. Mason (1996) describes people as "data sources" as "they are repositories of knowledge, evidence, and experience" (p. 35). Even though researchers may not know the information they will collect from their 'data sources', they do need to know the type of data they would like to collect in order to help them plan their interview structure and questions. In this study I wanted to collect narratives from the students that would convey information about who they were, how they acted in the world, and what they believed. In order to have participants share these stories, I structured interview questions that facilitated or initiated narratives in areas of the participants' lives of particular interest to the study. I also wanted to compare the data across the three participants and therefore the structured interview protocol fit the study's needs.

Type of interview structure.

Generally speaking, qualitative interviewing refers to "in-depth semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing…conversations with a purpose" (Mason, 1996, p. 38). These 'conversations with a purpose' or interviews are to be "relatively informal" with a "thematic, topic-centered, biographical or narrative approach," lead by the

assumption that data are generated due to the interaction between the researcher and respondent (Mason, 1996, p. 38).

> In structured interviews, unlike unstructured interviews, the interviewer asks each respondent a series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories…[with] little room for variation…[and] infrequent open-ended question may be used. The responses are recorded…according to a coding scheme…the interviewer controls the pace of the interview by treating the questionnaires as if it were a theatrical script to be followed in a standardized and straightforward manner. (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 363)

In structured interviews, each respondent is asked the same questions in the same order and through the same delivery. The overall purpose of the structure, and neutral "balanced rapport" created and maintained by the researcher is to "minimize 'bias' through the standardization of the questions" (Mason, 1996, p. 40). However, many individuals such as Mason, and Fontana and Frey (1994) argue that interviews occur in a social context and this context will influence the findings. Therefore, in the analysis of the data the overall situated nature of interviews, the respondent's worldview, and other "forces [that] might stimulate or retard response" need to be accounted for (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 364). Thus, it can be argued that one "cannot separate the interview from the social interaction in which it was produced…it is better to try to understand the complexities of the interaction, rather than to pretend that key dimensions can be controlled for" (Mason, 1996, pp. 40-41). Therefore, although researchers can try their best to minimize bias and the influence of the social environment of the interview on the findings, errors can still occur. Acknowledging,

addressing and understanding the social environment and variables that may play a role in creating error is important in the reporting of any findings. Fontana and Frey (1994) suggest three areas in interviewing where errors can occur: a) the respondents act or respond according to how they think they should instead of how they truly feel to please the interviewer, b) the questionnaire type or wording, and c) the interviewer's delivery (p. 364). Researchers should be aware of these areas of potential error and analyze their findings to address how and where these variables may have affected their findings.

I addressed theses areas of potential error by communicating to my participants before the interviews started that there were no correct answers to the questions. I also stated that they should not feel like they need to think of what I am looking for in an answer or need to impress me with their answers. Indeed, I told participants to answer as honestly as they could. Also, I followed the wording of each questions as closely as I could for every interview and tried to keep my delivery the same for each participant.

In the context of my study I used a semi-structured "open-ended" interview protocol that allowed for "flexibility" in participant responses with room for further probing questions to be asked to find "deeper issues of interest to the interviewee" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40). The strengths of the open-ended structure of interviewing contributed to the overall "comparability of responses" and "completeness of data," and minimized the "interviewer biases" as each participant was asked the same series of questions in the same order (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 43). However, in ensuring that the same structure of questioning was followed for each participant for comparability, the ability to adapt or modify

questions for the unique individual was in some ways limited (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Many of the questions I used for my semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F) were either directly quoted from or summarized from McCarthey (2001). I used these questions because my study had many of the same objectives as McCarthey's study of identity construction in elementary readers and writers. I also wanted to see if by repeating McCarthey's questions I could find some commonalities between the two studies bringing further understanding to the theory of identity construction in the literacy classroom. A few of McCarthey's original queries were deleted as they sought personal information of the participants that was not important to my study, such as questions pertaining to languages spoken in the home or writing habits. Other questions were reworded to ensure that the middle school participants would understand them. During the interviews, questions were modified only when the participant needed further clarification or examples to understand the question's intent.

As described previously, I set up the interviews with the student participants through email correspondence. I arranged times and locations for the interviews, with help from the middle school's Administrative Assistant, who was able to book classrooms for me. Each interview occurred during non-instructional hours in a quiet and private location at the school.

All three interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by me for data analysis. Students were informed through email that their transcripts would be ready for them at the office to pick up. I took each participant's transcripts to the school in a sealed envelope and left them with the Administrative Assistant in the office. I gave

the students time to read, verify, and make any necessary changes, to the transcripts. Students were required to sign the transcripts to give me ongoing consent to use their data in my final reporting. The signed transcripts were again left in the office with the Administrative Assistant, for me to pick up. Beyond a few grammatical and spelling errors, no major changes were made to the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Anfara, Brown and Manigone (2002) argue that interview questions should be written, "on the basis of what truly needs to be known" (p. 31). Therefore, each interview question should be written with the intention of obtaining data for one or more research questions. Table 1 below illustrates how each of the interview questions was related to the research questions. Linking the interview questions with the research questions also helps the researcher organize the data, once it is collected, according to the corresponding research question it seeks to answer. As outlined in Chapter One, only the sub-questions are addressed in this section, as they work together to answer the central research questions of, "What is the relationship between identity and reading success for the talented reader?"

Table 1

Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions

Research Question	**Interview Question**
a) How do one's personal narratives contribute to one's sense of their overall identity?	1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A 1B, 2B, 3B, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B 1C, 2C, 3C, 4C, 5C, 6C, 7C 1D, 2D, 3D, 5D, 7D, 8D, 9D, 10D, 11D, 12D, 13D, 14D, 15D 1E, 2E, 3E, 4E, 5E, 6E, 7E, 8E, 9E, 10E, 11E, 12E, 13E, 14E, 15E, 16E, 17E, 18E, 19E, 20E, 21E, 22E, 23E, 24E

b) What relationship do these narratives have with one's academic success in the area of reading for talented readers?	3A, 4A, 5A, 8A, 9A 4B 2C, 3C 1D, 2D, 3D, 4D, 5D, 6D, 7D, 8D, 9D, 10D, 11D, 12D, 13D, 14D, 15D 1E, 2E, 3E, 4E, 5E, 6E, 7E, 8E, 9E, 10E, 11E, 12E, 13E, 14E, 15E, 16E, 17E, 18E, 19E, 20E, 21E, 22E, 23E, 24E
c) How does the talented reader position one's identity in the literacy classroom?	8A, 9A 2C, 3C, 4C 1D, 2D, 3D, 8D, 9D, 10D, 11D, 12D, 13D, 14D, 15D 1E, 12E, 16E, 17E, 18E, 19E, 20E, 21E, 22E

Once each participant had verified and consented to my on-going use of their transcripts, by reading and signing them, I worked with each case, individually at first, to analyze the transcripts through a process of "direct interpretation" (Creswell, 2007, p. 103). Focusing on the transcripts of one participant, I examined how her responses connected to one research question at a time. I completed this analysis by highlighting important words, ideas or larger quotes that linked to the main focus of one of the three research question. For instance, for the research question, "How do one's personal narratives contribute to one's sense of their overall identity?" I highlighted the following words and phrases in Anna's transcripts: "*I have never liked the thought of generic;*" "*I don't care if people think I'm weird;*" and "*unique.*" Once I highlighted all of the ideas, words and phrases linking to the one research question, I reread the highlighted data to understand how these ideas were related. My goal was to connect the data under overarching "themes," which are referred to as categories in this study (Creswell, 2007, p. 153). I grouped together ideas that were repeated by cutting and pasting my highlighted passages from the transcripts into a chart. When I finished

grouping ideas, I reread the words and phrases to generate an appropriate or overarching category name. Quotations from the participants were used as much as possible to be the names of categories (in vivo). Table 2 below provides an example of how I organized data and created category names. Category names are highlighted in red, and phrases, quotes, and words connected to this category are listed below.

Table 2 illustrates the category "*I never liked the thought of generic*" and related data. Subcategories were used under this theme because many of Anna's responses to the questions contained narratives about not being *generic*. For Anna, her belief that she was not generic, affected how she defined her personality, future goals, academic choices, and reading choices, and filtered whose opinions of herself she regarded as important. Under the subcategories, I pasted quotes from the data into the table that supported the overarching category. This process of connecting bits of data under categories was repeated for all of the other questions and for the other two participants.

Table 2

Organization of Themes in Relation to Research Questions for Anna

Research Question	Thematic Category	Sub-categories	Quotations from Transcripts
2. a) How do one's personal narratives contribute to one's sense of their overall identity?	i. "I have never liked the thought of generic"	i. Identity as un-generic	i. Anna believed one's identity is made up of many different moods and characteristics, just as she "admires people for different characteristics." "Again that would depend on the perception. I don't really care if people think I am weird. I am actually kind of proud of that. I take it as unique. Positive attitude."
		ii. Moods	ii. "Well that depends if I was feeling rather modest that day or not."

	iii. Choices in School	iii. "It depends on how I am feeling that day. If I am feeling lovely and energetic then I like Socials and English and Com. Skills, I like Com. Skills a lot. I like Math too depending on what we are doing that day. I like the algebra unit. But if I am not feeling particularly energetic that day I like the subjects that do not require that much thinking that I can just kind of day dream while doing my work, like choir or art."
	iv. Reading Choices	iv. "Depending on how I am feeling that day. I have been reading just the Harry Potter series for about a week now, and I was getting a bit sick of it, so I was about to pick up the other books. If I am in a sad mood I will try to find a funny book. Or if I am in just a regular mood I will find a book that is kind of encouraging."
	v. Future Goals	v. "I am interested in acting, it might be interesting to be an actress, however there is the whole pressure thing. It depends on how I am feeling that day, if I am feeling like being in the spotlight that day. If I am feeling pretty low key that day, I am not sure I am pretty happy being who I am"; "I like the fine arts, acting, drama, music and art, but those things tend to be more public, so if I am feeling a bit more low key maybe some of the science, herbology, zoology."

The purpose of creating Table 2 for each participant was to "bring meaning, structure and order to [the] data" that were collected (Anfara, Brown & Manigone, 2002, p. 31). This reorganization of data allowed "naturalistic generalizations" to

emerge, which in turn informed the writing of the descriptive analysis of each case (Creswell, 2007, p. 163).

In order to complete a cross-case analysis of the three cases I adopted the method of code mapping (Anfara, Brown & Manigone, 2002) to organize and bring together the pieces of data gathered through my research. Code mapping is the process of "identifying" and "tagging" data during an initial reading of the transcripts with theme or category names (codes) to organize the raw data under identifiable codes for retrieval during the cross-case analysis (Anfara, Brown & Manigone, 2002, p. 33). Each of the initial category names identified in the analysis of each individual case, such as the one displayed in Table 2, ("*I never liked the thought of generic*") were brought together among the cases to determine where they overlapped and/or differed. This cross-case analysis was done by comparing all of the tables I made for each student, to find commonalities and uniqueness between the individual categories under each research question for each participant. Although all of the categories were not exactly the same, especially when direct quotes were used for category names, the data and quotes used to support the categories were carefully read and reread to identify commonalities and or differences between categories. For example, one of the categories identified for Olivia, "*darker student side of me,*" connected with Anna's "*I never liked the thought of generic.*" The three participants believed that many unique attributes constituted their non-generic selves, especially in comparison to some of their peers. Therefore, these categories formed the basis for a common category of "*unique vs. generic.*" All common categories were then entered into Table 3 in the first iteration (Anfara, Brown & Manigone, 2002, p. 32). All of these initial common

categories were also organized into columns connecting the findings to the corresponding research questions. What I found interesting in this stage of the cross-case analysis was that there were more similarities in the participants' data than differences. The few differences are discussed in Chapter 5, but most differences were in levels of intensity to which a participant subscribed (agreed or disagreed) to a certain category. For instance, Anna's data revealed that she relied on the opinions of others to a far lesser extent than the other two students. Therefore, this difference is discussed in the cross-case analysis of research question 3. The second iteration of Table 3 enabled me to identify further patterns and create more encompassing categories for the data categories in the first iteration. Sometimes two or more categories worked together to create one larger category. For example, "*unique versus generic,*" was similar to the data in the categories of "*I know who I am*" and "*I like to express who I am.*" Together, these three categories explained how the three participants believed and repeated the importance of knowing one's self, expressing it, and being unique in the process. Therefore, these three smaller categories were combined to form the larger category of "*strong sense of self.*" However, some of the smaller categories did not connect with any other categories, even in the second iteration of the table, and therefore they remained as their own category. For example in the first iteration, under research question 1 (column 1) category *1b. clear ideas about future goals* did not connect with any other categories and therefore transitioned into the second iteration as category *b. clear future goals*, with no inclusion of other categories at this second level. The purpose of the second iteration was to identify some general connections or commonalities between the three participants' data. Due

to the analysis work completed during the first two iterations of Table 3, by the third iteration I was able to develop a broader understanding of how the data related and connected to answer each of the three research questions. The three iterations of Table 3 were fundamental in developing the written cross-case analysis.

Table 3

Code Mapping of the Data from the Three Participants

Third Iteration: Research Questions		
RQ#1: **How do one's personal narratives contribute to one's sense of their overall identity?** **Broad understanding: Students clearly used language and narratives to convey a strong sense of self and identity.**	**RQ#2: What relationship do these narratives have with one's academic success in the area of reading for talented readers?** **Broad understanding: Students' strong self-efficacy both inside and outside of the classroom contributed to their ability to assess their learning and success. A positive attitude and a sense of purpose motivated these students to challenge themselves as learners.**	**RQ#3: How does the talented reader position one's identity in the literacy classroom?** **Broad understanding: Students were aware of how they wanted to be seen/positioned in the literacy classroom and made conscious choices to be positioned a particular way.**
Second Iteration: Patterned Variables		
a. Strong sense of self. b. Clear Future Goals c. Personal Lives Shared – openness	a. Strong self-efficacy + positive attitude towards learning b. Motivations behind reading c. Identity + literacy = connecting to literature by identifying with characters	a. Modest positioning of self b. Peer influence c. Identities outside of being talented not as strong?
Third Iteration: Initial Codes/Surface Analysis		
1a. Unique vs. generic 1a. I know who I am 1a. I like to express who I am 1b. Clear ideas about future goals 1c. Narratives express clearly the self	2a. Knew what it meant to be a good student/reader 2a. Positive attitude towards learning and reading. 2a. Clear definition of a good reader 2a. Knows success based on the perceptions of others 2b. Must enjoy reading 2b. Not motivated by teachers 2b. Self motivated to read outside of class 2c. Connected to characters	3a. Reflexive positioning of self as a good reader 3a. Reading quickly an important characteristic for positioning of a good reader 3b. Peers hold strongest opinions 3c. Frustrated with judgments made outside of the classroom

	in favourite series 2c. Needs to be able to relate or connect with characters	3c. Building strong peer relationships

Verification Strategies

Creswell (2007) describes eight verification strategies that can be used to assess the validity of a qualitative study, and he states that a study should use at least two of these strategies (p. 209). Of the eight verification strategies suggested by Creswell, two were used in my study: member checking and clarifying researcher bias. To begin, according to Creswell (2007), member checking "is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be 'the most critical technique for establishing credibility'" (p. 208). Member checking was used in my study on two occasions by ensuring that each participant read and consented to the accuracy of her transcripts in representing her thoughts and opinions. Secondly each participant was invited to read the final report, findings and conclusions related to her interview. I also disclosed my bias as a researcher, due to my previous relationship with the school and two of the three participants, in this chapter. The disclosure of researcher bias is important as it ensures "that unexplored bias does not creep into the work" and that all parts of the research are made public (Anfara, Brown & Manigone, 2002, p. 30).

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

My study consisted of only three participants who were bounded to one environment. Due to the small sample of a unique group of students the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population or speak for talented readers in general. However, as Yin (2009) states, case studies rely on "analytic generalization. In analytical generalizations, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of

results to some broader theory" (p. 43). Therefore, although the findings in this study are not generalizable to the population of talented readers, the findings may be able to contribute to the theory of how identity and reading achievement are linked for talented readers; a definite strength of the study.

Another weakness of the study was the lack of triangulation of data. Triangulation of data, whether it is the further collection of sources, evaluators, perspectives or methods, increases validity due to the fact that "multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measure of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, pp. 116-7). Multiple sources of data were not used in this study, as I wanted to foreground the voice of the talented reader. In past studies that included many sources of data for triangulation, the voices of the students and their perspectives were often lost. However, future studies could combine the voice of and data from the talented reader, with voices from other people (such as peers, parents and teachers), as the inclusion of additional opinions. I believe the triangulation of various perspectives in future studies would be vital due to the fact that one's identity has been theorized as being "socially constructed" (Gee, 2001; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Therefore, in order to fully understand the holistic nature of an identity that is socially constructed, the perspectives of others are essential (McCarthey, 2001). Although my three participants were asked what others thought of them, to help provide a more holistic sense of identity, it would have been better to have others personally share their interpretations and opinions.

Finally, an unexpected strength to the study may have been my relationship with two of the participants. Being a past teacher of Anna and Olivia may have helped

to create an environment that was more open and trusting. The data from my two past students were far richer than the information shared by Sophia, whom I had not taught in the past. Therefore, it could be plausible that my previous relationship with two of the participants affected their participation in the study. There may have also been negative consequences to this past relationship, but none were observable during the interview and evident in the data analysis.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methods used to the three student interviews. Examples were provided to demonstrate how the interview findings were analyzed into categories and then used to find areas of commonalities and uniqueness across the cases. In Chapter Four I discuss each of the case studies individually and then highlight how the findings relate directly to each of the three guiding research questions. Each case study begins with a brief overview of the participant's background, as this information is necessary for understanding individual findings. I then provide a summary of how each participant's data connects to the three guiding research questions. Chapter Four concludes with a summary that discusses the similarities found among the three cases.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Bakhtin (1986) stated that, "there can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance" (p. 84). Therefore, every utterance in an interview is laden with meaning and it is the researcher's job to analyze and discover the meaning in what may seem to be neutral comments. The goal of this study was to examine the rich utterances of the three participants to explore the relationship between the talented reader's identity and her/his achievement in the literacy classroom. As Anna, one of the study's participants, astutely stated during her interview, the purpose of my investigation into what she, her parents, teachers and peers thought about her was to get "*a general view of who* [she] *thinks* [she is]" and how this view or idea about herself relates to her reading.

In this chapter, the data from each of the three talented Grade 8 student participants is discussed as a single case study. To review, I first analyzed the data collected from each individual in relation to each research question, and then I used the findings of the individual analyses to identify commonalities and differences across the cases. The discussion of each case is organized according to the three main research questions: how do one's personal narratives contribute to one's sense of their overall identity, what relationships do these narratives have with one's academic success in the area of reading for talented readers, and finally, how does the talented reader position their own identity in the literacy classroom.

The Case Study of Anna

Anna's interview took place during her lunch hour at the middle school. As a spare block followed her lunch hour we had extra time for the interview. Even though we had booked a private classroom, we were interrupted a few times by teachers and students. However, the interruptions never bothered Anna, and she carried on confidently after every break. Anna's overall interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, as she had many stories to share.

Anna had attended the private school since Grade 1. She described herself as an active participant at her school as she a member of the student council, band, choir, and field hockey team. Beyond school related activities, Anna stated that she spent most of her time thinking of "*ideas of things for*" her and her little brother to do, such as exploring the trails of their neighbourhood on bikes, and playing badminton or Lego. She also found quiet time for herself to listen to music or read. As an honours student, Anna explained that she has excelled at reading since Grade 1 when "*it clicked*" for her. She claimed that her passion for reading is so strong that secretly she is upset if her parents allow her to stay up late to watch a movie as it takes away from her valuable before bedtime reading, a nightly ritual for Anna that enables her to "*escape from the everyday world*."

Personal narratives and one's sense of overall identity.

Analysis of Anna's interview transcript revealed her confident and articulate ability to describe who she is and what is important to her in her life. Anna repeatedly expressed the importance of being a unique individual. She stated, *"I never liked the thought of generic. I think everyone should be their own person. I don't like it when*

others warp their personalities to be like everyone else." Anna further explained her idea about what a person should be when she stated that she *"admires people for different characteristics,"* appreciating that people are made up of many *"unique"* attributes. She discussed in detail how her days were guided or led by various moods, although she never elaborated on the causes or sources of her moods. Anna explained that in a given day she could feel *"lovely and energetic"* and wanting to be *"in the spotlight"* or feel *"a bit more low key"* and/or *"sad."* These moods, she explained, dictated her choices for the day, including the courses she enjoyed, the books she chose for her evening reading, and the manner in which she expressed herself to others. For instance, when asked how she would describe herself to a stranger, she initially replied, *"Well that depends if I was feeling rather modest that day or not."* However, since I was not a stranger and Anna did not seem to be feeling modest during our interview, she confidently described herself as follows.

> *Smart, I, this is going to sound vain, I'm pretty, I enjoy the weirdest sports you have ever seen, like lacrosse, badminton, archery. I am interested in fencing but I haven't done it yet. Honest, loyal, mildly courageous, and I am having trouble thinking of any others at the moment.*

The narratives and stories that Anna shared to answer the interview questions revealed that she has a strong sense of who she is, but at the same time thought that it was important to know others' opinions of herself, too. However, she seemed to value the opinions of only those people close to her or the opinions of others that supported her own vision of her identity. For instance, when asked about the opinions she thought her peers held about her Anna replied, *"I don't really care if people think I am*

weird. I am actually kind of proud of that. I take it as unique. Positive attitude." However, Anna expressed concern when peers judged her without knowing who she truly is: *"I am not sure why a couple people don't like me but they have never talked to me, and I am not exactly sure why that is, and I have always wanted to know why that whole thing is going on."* When asked what her parents or teachers thought about her or how they would describe her, Anna's answers connected to what she originally said about herself. She stated that her parents would describe her in the same way that she described herself, just more "*enthusiastically.*" According to Anna, her teachers would agree that she is "*smart*" but also a bit "*disorganized,*" characteristics that she had also identified about herself earlier in the interview. Anna shared that her brother's opinion is of high importance to her. She explained that her brother was asked to write a paragraph in school about a favourite family member and he wrote about Anna stating that she is,

> *smart and nice when I am not angry and that I come up with ideas for things for us to do, that I would enjoy but that he would also enjoy, even though he is younger and a boy.*

This story was very meaningful to Anna, and she recalled it as though it happened very recently, even though he had written these statements a few years ago.

Anna also shared through the interview that she had unique and "*intense views"* in comparison to her peers, which included her strong belief in vegetarianism as a way of life. This belief also illustrated what seemed to be a transition in who authored and created her identity, from her parents to more of a self-created identity. Anna stated that she initially became a vegetarian because of her mother, but she

continued to be one because of her own beliefs and choices. She supported this independence by stating that her parents would not "*object if I started to eat meat, but I really don't want to.*" Essentially, this example demonstrated how Anna had consciously chosen a part of her identity to keep based on her own opinions and values, while at the same time illustrating that she was aware of who authored this part of her identity (Gee, 2001).

Anna's overall sense of identity is strong because the "discourse space" that held the collection of narratives that she used to express herself were all in agreement (Gee, 2001, p. 111). The stories that Anna told about others' perceptions of who she is were all in agreement with her perception of herself. It seemed that the narratives surrounding her identity had helped to create a strong sense of self-efficacy. Uniquely central to Anna's sense of self is a strong belief that her opinions are the most important, as she stated that she loved opportunities to "*tell someone exactly what I think.*" Also, she felt in control of the choices in her life and responsible for them. For example, she stated that not only could she chose not to be a vegetarian if she wanted but her parents, beyond wanting her to be successful, had allowed her to "*choose which way [she] want[ed] to go,*" from choices in afterschool activities to future dreams. This sense of independence cultivated by her parents enabled Anna to make her own choices. Anna could also be confident in her choices because she knew that her parents believed in her ability to make appropriate choices on her own. The confidence Anna developed through her relationship with her parents also seemed to help create the strong sense of identity Anna had in the literacy classroom.

The relationship between student narratives and successful reading achievement.

Although Anna had a strong sense of who she is, she had an even clearer sense of what it meant to be a good student and reader. Anna stated that she knew she was smart because she got *"good grades," "participated in class enough"* (in her opinion), and found the work that she did was *"very simple."* During the interview Anna expressed strong opinions about the characteristics of a good reader: *"a good reader enjoys reading"* and *"they read until [they] understand it."* For Anna, reading for understanding included looking up words on her Kobo e-reader or asking her mother for definitions, both self-taught techniques. If she liked a book she was reading, instead of just *"zoom[ing] through it"* to *"figure out the plot"* she would go back and *"reread it a little bit slower to get all the details."* However, if she was reading something she did not like, she stated that she would not go back and reread it in detail. For example, when reading the assigned class novel *The Snow Goose* (Gallico, 1940), which did not interest her at all, she shared, *"I read the first couple paragraphs [and] then I started scanning it without paying attention. Then I realized what I was doing I had to go back and read it again."* Without interest, even as a talented reader, it was challenging for Anna to motivate herself to pay attention to and fully understand texts that were not engaging for her.

Also, it became clear through her descriptions of other good readers in her class, that being able to read "*quickly*" and reading large quantities of books "*over 400 pages*" were essential qualities of a good reader. Being able to memorize books was important to Anna's definition of a good reader, as she stated, "*I [have a] tendency to*

memorize books if I really like them." Books that Anna really enjoyed were also read multiple times. She stated, "*I go back and reread books after a month or two and that way it is like reading them all over again.*" For Anna, the rereading of a book was a new enjoyable adventure. In identifying herself as a good reader, others' perceptions were important only when they seemed to officially support her own reflexive view of herself as a good student. She did state, almost as a confession, that she thought her teachers and parents would not see her as a "*careful reader.*" When asked to explain the latter statement, she identified her speed of reading as the main cause of people's judgment.

> *They think I, 'cause I get a book the first day and be half way through it before I go to bed and I get up and I am on the last page and they ask, do you even understand what you are reading? And yes, I do. They don't really think I do. But, to me this is an average pace in my opinion.*

Although, as is evident in the above quote, Anna is aware of others' perceptions of her, what seemed clear from her transcripts was that in the end Anna's own opinion is the most important. Her opinions were always supported with examples from reality. For instance, Anna supported her opinion that she is a careful reader with clear examples of her reading behavior. Confidently, she believed that her skills were the same as other good readers, as she stated unwaveringly, "*a good reader enjoys reading, I think personally that is all that matters, as what else is the point of reading?"*

A talented reader's positioning in the literacy classroom.

An interesting pattern emerged in Anna's narratives about the positioning of her identity as a reader in the literacy classroom. Whenever she was asked to define or express parts of her identity from either her own or another's perspective, she always returned to her opinion of herself as being most important. When asked to express her identity as a reader or student, she never compared herself to others, but instead clearly articulated how she felt about herself. The two times when Anna compared herself to others, her parents and peers, it was to demonstrate or share that she believed that she is a good reader because she is *"quicker"* than others. She stated that a boy in her class is probably the best reader because he *"can get through a 400 page book in a day."* Anna believed that she is a good reader as she stated:

> *I am probably one of the better readers in my class because I can read a short story faster and with more enjoyment than most of the people in my class and I don't do the 'read-look up-sigh-look around', procrastinate reading. There are a lot of people who are very good readers, but not a lot of people who enjoy it.*

Therefore, to Anna the positioning of herself as a talented reader in the literacy classroom seemed "*obvious.*" In a way, Anna was expressing that the positioning of one's self in the literacy classroom perhaps did not have to be outwardly stated, as she suggested she did not have to "*wear a big sign on your head saying you are a good reader,*" but being a good reader was still implied by how she acted and participated in the classroom.

Anna reflexively positioned her identity in the literacy classroom as someone who participated often and with "*intense views.*" She stated that her participation was

important because she did not want to be seen as "*somebody who sits in the corner and doesn't pay attention to anything.*" To Anna it was extremely important for her to not be silent in the literacy classroom. She explained that classroom debates and discussions "*get me a bit riled up*" but that she was always *"glad for the opportunity to tell someone about exactly what I think.*" Beyond providing material for classroom debates, her "*intense views*" also dictated her reading choices. At the time of the interview she was consumed with the "*feminist girl power*" series of Tamora Pierce, which all take "*place in medieval times, a combination I really like,*" Anna explained. Anna was happy to share these outside of school reading choices with anyone because they were important to her. She found the main character in the series to be similar to herself, as she stated it was like Tamora Pierece had written the character exactly "*about me.*" Therefore, the choices she made in reading seemed to also reflexively communicate the identity she wanted to express to those around her. The characters in these stories reflected her beliefs, she could relate to them, and she wanted others, especially her peers, to know this connection.

Teachers' perceptions, according to Anna's responses, were not of high importance to her. Teachers' perceptions seemed to confirm what Anna already believed to be her identity as a reader and student: someone who is "*smart*" and a "*quick reader.*" She did not elaborate on her responses about her teachers' opinions, as the latter did not seem to be very important to her. As well, since the teachers' opinions collaborated with Anna's own beliefs about herself (in her opinion), she may have felt it unnecessary to discuss the teachers' perceptions in detail.

Overall, Anna's narratives demonstrated how she was able to use language as a "symbolic tool" to express the "shaped consciousness" of her identity (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 425). The choices she made in her reading, such as novels by Tamora Pierce, helped to reinforce the identity she had constructed for herself, as a strong, independent "*feminist*" with passionate beliefs. Anna's connection to Tamora Pierce's characters supports the statements by Moje and Luke (2009) that texts can work as tools to help develop or construct identities. Although upset or puzzled when peers did not like her, these perceptions did not seem to take away from Anna's sense of self as an individual, a sister, a daughter, a student and a friend. Anna, because she has a strong sense of her identity, was clearly able to articulate what is important to her, who she is, her future goals, whose perceptions of herself she valued, and how she positioned herself in the literacy classroom during the interview.

The Case Study of Olivia

Olivia and I met for her interview during the end of her lunch hour and during an exploratory block, in which she often did homework or extra credit, honours work. Olivia seemed very excited about our interview and the first few minutes were spent with her asking me about my maternity leave. As a former student, she was very anxious to talk with me about my year away from the school. I almost felt reluctant starting the interview, as it was very enjoyable to have time with Olivia one-on-one, as this situation rarely occurred in the classroom. Perhaps because of our previous connection, Olivia's interview was 91 minutes in duration, and every moment was full of rich stories and examples.

In Grade 6 Olivia had transferred to the private school from another local, smaller, girls-only private school. This transition was an important move for Olivia, as she stated during our interview, "*I didn't really know who I was really before I came to [St. Joseph's]*." Beyond academics Olivia was a member of the field hockey and volleyball teams, and was involved in an enrichment program at the school. Outside of school she was enrolled in a local Math program and received speech coaching, in preparation for a Festival she had just attended. However, she stated that both of these activities were starting to get "*annoying because her parents forced*" her to take them. She insisted that this year would be her last year of participating in each of these activities. As an honours student, Olivia stated that she has always loved to read, especially when novels were "*relatable*" or when the texts "*inspired*" her to change something about herself or to look at her life with a new perspective. In relating favourite past experiences in reading she recalled when she was "*inspired*" by the Warriors series (Hunter, 2003) in elementary school and got all her "*friends at school to read them, and we played cats at school, and I had my own Warrior name.*" Reading was at the heart of many related stories about social connections and/or positive experiences and it also seemed to hold significant points of personal reflections that Olivia had on her life.

Personal narratives and one's sense of overall identity.

Analysis of the interview transcript revealed that Olivia confidently described what is important to her, her strengths and weaknesses, and how she thought others saw her. During the interview she initially described herself by stating, *"I am pretty dramatic*

and loud, and really quirky. I get hyper a lot but I also have my down days where I just like to be quiet." In her free time she expressed that she enjoyed

> *going on the computer. Facebook is kind of awesome to me, it is just what I do when I am on the computer. And I like school because of the people in it, not really so much the classes, but because of my friends, and interacting with people I like doing that*.

Olivia conveyed that a new urgency in her life is the importance and significance of friends, as she commented, *"I used to really like school, I liked learning and stuff, but now I find it really boring."* Beyond friends, Olivia thought that it was important to grow up to be someone who was *"inspirational;" "I want to be somebody who is really influential, somebody who as a name for themselves."* When asked what she would like to inspire people about she responded "*the environment, like Al Gore.*" Olivia also valued people around her who were honest and true to their word. For example, if she perceived that teachers presented, what she called "*double standards*" to the class, she would not hesitate to verbally challenge them and she believed the latter was at the core of teacher comments around her "*behavioural issues.*"

The opinions of peers, and to a lesser extent her parents and teachers, seemed very important to creating Olivia's sense of self; however, it was evident from her answers that some people's opinions of her are more important than others. When asked why she thought others' perceptions of her are so important she replied,

> *because I am not quite sure of who I am myself and I feel like I can't pull that out by myself, because if no one had any perceptions of me, even if they were*

bad, then I would still be as lost as I was in Grade 6, and don't know I just would be living for nothing really, but now that, well as soon as you get others' perceptions you sort of adopt them I guess.

At the time of the interview, Olivia communicated that the most powerful opinions in her life were the perceptions of her peers. When asked how she knew that she is "*dramatic*" and "*quirky,*" Olivia explained that her peers described her as such and therefore that is how she thought of herself. She was confident that her teachers would state that she is "*hard working*" and "*mature,*" but she also thought that they misunderstood her. Olivia conveyed that she often felt that her English teacher thought that she was "*depressed*" as she stated,

he pulls me aside after classes and asks me what is going on with my life and tells me I need to hug my parents and stuff, but he just doesn't get that I have a lot of tired days.

Although Olivia was not concerned that her teachers misunderstood her, she was bothered by the perceptions of her mother. Olivia conveyed that her mother had *"a lot of expectations"* of her.

My mom wants me to be a lawyer, she wants me to be a doctor, she wants me to be a like a politician…in her eyes being successful is not about being connected with yourself and in tune with yourself, but rather being rich. She wants me to be rich. But, my dad just wants me to be a good person really and to be happy, because he feels that money doesn't bring happiness. He wants me to be spiritual.

Olivia explained that her mother's expectations are different than her father's because of her mother's previous life experiences. When angry, Olivia stated that her mother calls her a Tibetan name meaning "*ugly colour.*" When I asked her why she thinks her mother calls her this name she replied:

> *Ah, because she gets really annoyed with me. I think she wants me, she is not satisfied with her life so she wants me to not go in the same direction she did, but she does not have a good method to convey that, and sometimes she does, but she has the one speech and she says like 17 times over and over every week. She really does want the best for me, she just doesn't know how to say it, so she gets frustrated and says mean things.*

Although her mother's opinion is important to her, it was not central in defining Olivia's sense of self. Olivia stated repeatedly throughout the interview that what she believed to be important in life was changing. She stated, "*but now I am starting to see things more for myself so I don't listen to that much anymore;*" 'that' being the lectures her parents give her about the importance of school and preparing for the future. Olivia's transition away from being defined by her parents' vision of her identity was also similar to the redefinition Olivia was experiencing of her identity as a student.

The relationship between student narratives and successful reading achievement.

Similar to how her parents' opinions of, and *"lectures"* about, school used to be important to Olivia, so too did the opinions of teachers. Central to the description of who Olivia thought she is as a student was how her teachers saw her, as she stated,

> *A lot of teachers say when they first meet me they think I am going to be a star student and wonderful and always attentive in class and then they get to know me better and they see the darker student side of me, that just isn't really afraid to talk back.*

A key characteristic to being a successful student and reader for Olivia is to have a "*strong opinion*" about what one is reading or learning, whether one liked it or not. Therefore, Olivia also had some very strong opinions about the attributes and actions of a good reader. When asked what a good reader does she replied:

> *Read more, take things out of the story, digest them, and think about things from different perspectives, different angles, push through even if it is a bad part in a book, keep going and try to find something that is good in it. I bet there is something good in it, even if something is really boring, I bet there is something interesting about the literature that they could pull out, good readers might ingest words that they read.*

Olivia also had a lot of ideas and suggestions about what teachers could do to support readers in the classroom, such as providing more time for reading and writing in-class, and choice in reading materials. When probed, Olivia made it clear that she thought she is "*lazy"* (like her parents stated) but believed this perception of her behaviour was due to the fact that she was not challenged in the literacy classroom. Olivia stated:

> *To be completely honest I am not being challenged, but because I am lazy I think that I've been convincing myself that it is a challenge and so hard, but it isn't, I am just not motivated to do that.*

Olivia was self-motivated to read outside of the classroom because she enjoyed having a selection of genres to read from, such as "*action, adventure*" and "*really stupid teenager girl books.*" In Olivia's opinion, a variety of reading material was not found in her literacy classroom nor was time provided for uninterrupted reading. Having time to read, write and think in class was important to Olivia as she stated repeatedly, "*I don't like the time limit or the rush. I like to have my own time to write things in class.*" Olivia also repeated that assignments in English were "*boring*" and "*stupid.*" When asked why she found the assignments to be of this nature she replied:

> *What makes it stupid is when we get a topic or something and the topic is chosen for us, and we don't have a topic to make up or write about, and you just feel really caged, and it makes it stupid, and you feel like you are doing it for him and rather than for yourself. Also, I wouldn't want anything to be really, really abstract. I like homework assignments that have guidelines and stuff, but not so much that I am caged, but no so little that I don't even know where to start.*

A final theme that emerged from Olivia's interview transcripts was the idea that for her reading and the lessons she learned from the narratives she read enriched her overall life. For example, when asked why she liked James Harriet's novels so much she replied,

> *His writing is really humorous, but it can also be sad. It is like my life. My emotions are really his stories. I like reading a lot at once. They just take you up and down and that is how my emotions go*.

In school Olivia was inspired by novels she found to be relatable. For instance, she stated that the only book she truly enjoyed reading in Grade 8 was *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965). Olivia shared that

> The Outsiders *was easy to relate to because of the Socs and the Greasers, that division is very evident in this school as well. And like I could see that, we don't get into fights, but we do verbally of course, and it looked at the different ways to look at each other. I liked that book because I felt like if other people read it, and it helped me to open up to see that other people have problems and that our class is like that and that it doesn't have to be like that.*

Olivia explained that Ponyboy, the main character of *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965), was relatable to her because of "*his unique way of looking at*" and observing life. According to Olivia, Ponyboy's character changed the way she looked at her own life. She stated:

> *Ponyboy was really fresh, his look on life, even though everyone around him was depressed, and down, [and] resigned. He was fresh, gold, like they say in the book. He just appreciated things so much and it made me appreciate things to. I went home and I watched a sunset, because of him watching sunsets and stuff, he just seemed so kind and really deep. He did have his moments.*

Olivia learned to "*appreciate*" or look at her life from a different perspective due to the characters and themes in the novel she read, and being challenged in this way to personally grow or reflect on life was an important aspect of why reading was so significant in her life. Being able to connect with her readings also recapitulated why she thought it was important for there to be choice in reading at school, as she

recognized that what she enjoyed in her reading was not always what her peers enjoyed. Therefore, one book could not fit all. Olivia also believed that in order to be a good reader one needed to search "*to see what is beneath*" the written text on the page. She stated that she found searching for the subtext challenging when she read material that was about characters from backgrounds too unlike her own. Olivia found these novels, like *White Jade Tiger* (Lawson, 1993), which she read in elementary school, "*really tiring too, as there is so much as you have to reach a mile to get to try to understand where they are getting at"* to go beyond just "*the surface meaning."*

As a final point, Olivia expressed that rereading a novel often highlighted areas of personal growth. In describing why James Harriet's novels were important to her she replied:

> *It is important to me because when I was younger I read it and I am reading it now, and I can still remember what I thought during that time and it is so different and interesting to see how my perceptions have changed and expanded and I like that.*

A talented reader's positioning in the literacy classroom.

Olivia reflexively and interactively positioned herself in the literacy classroom. Reflexively she positioned herself as a talented reader by participating in class discussions because she believed she had a *"good grasp"* on the readings, *"enough to be able to contribute without looking really stupid."* She explained that her *"passionate"* opinions about reading were important enough to share. Olivia stated, *"whether I really hate them or really like them and I like to express them so that everyone knows."* She also knew that others think that she is a good reader because they are impressed with her

use of *"big words"* in class. Olivia's comment demonstrated consciousness of how her use of language positioned her above other readers in the class. Olivia also positioned herself as a good reader due to the fact that, in comparison to her peers, she could *"quickly"* read the texts in class and understand them. Interactively, Olivia took up the narrative of her teacher stating that she too believed, like Mr. R., that she is *"well advanced beyond her peers."* However, she disagreed with the reasoning behind the perceptions of her parents, who, according to Olivia, would say that she is *"lazy"* and *"not motivated."* Olivia felt unchallenged in school and therefore she convinced herself that her schoolwork was *"a challenge and so hard"* because she was *"just not motivated to do"* the work. Based on Olivia's transcripts, it seemed that she found her school work neither engaging nor challenging, and therefore she was not motivated to follow instructions, assignment expectations, or work to her potential. Olivia stated that she did almost all of her assignments last minute because school work no longer seemed to be a central focus and she was no longer motivated.

The Case Study of Sophia

Sophia's interview was 25 minutes in duration. Her interview occurred during her lunch hour in a quiet classroom in the school. Sophia seemed nervous at first, probably due to the fact that she did not know me. It took about the first five minutes for Sophia to open up and feel comfortable talking with me. During the first few minutes of the interview she did not maintain eye contact with me, her body was physically closed and turned away from me, and her responses were short yes or no answers. Once she became more comfortable, her responses increased in length and detail, and her body language became more relaxed. However, throughout the

interview Sophia never seemed to be as comfortable with me or as relaxed in answering the interview questions at length as the other two participants. The lack of detail or trust in fully expressing herself to me may be attributed to the fact that I was a stranger to her or perhaps her resistance was a part of her personality, or due to another variable.

Grade 8 was Sophia's first year at the private school and she was a boarder. This change of schooling for Sophia was, in her words, "*fun.*" She described that after attending St. Joseph's for a short period of time she phoned her mother to tell her "*it was like real school, you get homework and stuff;*" "stuff" that Sophia did not have at her previous school. Sophia belonged to school sport teams, and also took a dance class that was offered through the boarding program. However, her favourite after school activity was hanging out with her friends, especially going to the "*Farmers Market*" with her best friend every Saturday.

Personal narratives and one's sense of overall identity.

As stated above, Sophia's narratives and answers to my questions were brief. However, her transcripts revealed that Sophia felt very comfortable talking about her identity, and her identity as a reader or student.

Sophia communicated that she is very happy with her identity. When asked, if she could be anyone in the world who would she be, she answered, "*I am just pretty happy being me.*" However, she did acknowledge that there are certain characteristics that other people have that she too would like to possess, conveying that there is some room for personal growth. When asked to describe herself to me, she began by stating, "*I am not really sure*" and then stated that her friends would say that she is *"really*

outgoing," "happy," "smart" and "*moody."* She stated that her parents would describe her as someone who is "*energetic, bubbly,[and] fairly smart,"* a description she believed to be similar to her own description of herself. When asked about her teachers' opinions of her, Sophia said that their definition of her as a student would be "*smart but talks.*" She explained, *"I work hard to get projects done,*" "*I like to participate*," and "*my friends talk a lot in class, and we get asked to move desks."* Sophia's answers to the interview questions demonstrated that her peers' perceptions of her were the most important perceptions to her sense of self. When asked why others' perceptions, like her peers, were so important to her, she answered, "*Because I know who I am but, the way other people see me as a person helps make me who I am.*" Therefore, the opinions of others seemed to play a large part in creating and defining her identity.

School and the work completed at school were significant to Sophia and her future identity. Sophia stated that she wanted to be a museum curator when she was older, because she loved to travel and "*place things, so that they have a spot where they are supposed to go.*" Her cousin, she explained, had the same job at a university, but Sophia was very clear in communicating that she came up with this idea before her cousin. The latter statement of independence was important to Sophia. She believed that the work she was doing in school gave her the "*basic skills*" to be successful in later schooling and life, but it was "*nothing you probably needed to know forever.*" School, friends, the careers of her parents and her future goals were all areas that Sophia understood very clearly.

During the interview Sophia often mentioned that there were times, in her not so distant past, when she did not understand certain areas of her life. For instance, she stated that her mother would not let her read *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) until she understood the meaning of rape, but now that she knew what rape was she was reading the book. Also, with respect to this particular selection of literature, Sophia stated that she connected with the character of Scout, because she transitions from a younger, naïve character who "*doesn't understand much*" to someone who "*starts understanding things*" and "*you are right there with her.*" This transformation of Soc was significant to Sophia, and in my opinion seemed to mirror the transition of Sophia from naivety to maturity. Throughout the interview, when speaking mostly about her life and characters she connected with in novels, Sophia stated that there are two places one can live: the place of not understanding and the place of understanding. It was important to Sophia that she could now understand certain issues such as rape, or the lessons she learned through her mother's experience with breast cancer, as she stated, "*My mom had cancer last year and that really changed a lot in all of our lives and it is definitely what I remember*." Although she did not talk in great detail about these new understandings, they were important to her and part of her identity. As an individual, daughter, student and reader, Sophia seemed to be transitioning in many ways from a place of not understanding to understanding.

The relationship between student narratives and successful reading achievement.

Sophia's responses to questions about herself as a reader or student were similar to the answers she gave to questions about her identity. Sophia had a strong

sense of who she is as a student, both "smart and talkative." She also had strong opinions about what made someone a strong reader. She described a strong reader as someone who,

> *reads really quickly*, *probably understands the book and rereads paragraphs that they don't get instead of just going through it and then forgetting about it. And they probably read different types of books, instead of one type all the time*.

Sophia stated that she knew that she is a good reader because she reread books that she loved, she "*read really quickly,*" and she understood what she was reading. She explained that others' opinions or perceptions of her as a reader did not matter. Further, when asked to describe how others, such as her teacher, peers and parents, would describe her habits as a reader, the descriptions were the same as her own, "*quickly and I understand*" and "*reads a lot.*"

Sophia's confidence in expressing her identity as a reader was stronger and more self-directed when compared to how she expressed her identity outside of the classroom. When asked to describe her identity outside of the classroom, she did so through the lens of her peers, opinions she did not rely on to express her reading identity, suggesting that she had more confidence in her academic identity. For instance, when asked to describe herself her answer started with, "*Um, I am not really sure. But, like my friends say…."* However, when asked to describe herself as a reader her answer started with, *"I read really quickly,"* a statement based on her own opinion and not others. Also, in response to every question about school, her identity as a reader, or her reading/literacy experiences, Sophia's responses were always positive,

conveying that she truly enjoyed school. She thought it sounded a bit "*nerdy*" but she sincerely found school to be fun and did not "*mind doing the work;*" indeed she actually seemed to welcome the work. In addition to enjoying school, she also talked quite a bit about the social aspects of learning during the interview. Sophia stated several times that she is talkative and knew that she would do "*better*" if she was "*not talking.*" However, she explained that she enjoyed sharing her ideas, and books with friends. Also, she much preferred to discuss books in class than write reports or complete comprehension quizzes on the texts.

An interesting finding from Sophia's transcripts was that although she felt she connected with various books and characters, such as Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) and Johnny from *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965), she could not articulate why these connections or novels were important to her. As described earlier, her identity, like these two main characters, seemed to be under transformation, and although she articulated that she is similar to these two characters, as she stated, "*Both care about family, and they don't understand things and that frustrates them,*" she did not make the connection between their lives and that of her own, suggesting that she did not completely understand her development and connection to these characters.

A talented reader's positioning in the literacy classroom.

Sophia positioned herself in the literacy classroom in two distinct ways. Firstly, she defined and therefore reflexively positioned herself as a quick reader who understood what she reads without having to reread material, and this definition was repeated throughout her interview. In her opinion, a fast reader is a good reader. Secondly, when

asked how she knew that she is smart she replied, *"I guess when we get marks back we kind of compare marks."* However, when asked to identify who is a good reader in her class, she could not identify anyone beyond herself. It seemed that she had also *"taken up"* the position of being an A student and a good reader based on the comments and identity that her teacher provided for her (Harre & van Langnehove, 1991). In contradiction though, when asked if it was important for others, such as parents, peers and teachers, to see her as a good reader, she stated, *"No".* Without observing her actions and interactions with others in her class I do not know whether or not she valued others' perceptions of her as a good reader. Sophia's responses seemed to indicate that it was important for her to know the opinions of others about parts of her identity, like her personality, but not her identity in the literacy classroom. Sophia constructed her identity in the literacy classroom by comparing marks, and therefore she seemed more confident in self-perpetuating and presenting her reading identity because her marks provided tangible evidence.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, Anna, Olivia and Sophia confidently presented a clear sense of who they thought are as individuals and readers. In Chapter 5, I discuss in detail how the similarities among the three case studies create a more general picture of the talented reader. In the cross-case analysis I also discuss how the participants differed with respect to some of the themes and the theories surrounding reading achievement and identity. I connect the findings to the theoretical foundations and to the past research that were described in Chapter Two. The insights provided by the three students about their literacy education directly inform the sections on

recommendations for teachers and suggestions for future research. A final reflection on the project summarizes the insight learned from this research that will forever inform my teaching practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

Cross-Case Analysis and Conclusions

This chapter begins with a synthesis of the findings organized according to the three research questions. I discuss similarities and differences among the three cases studies, and then consider how the findings answer the main research question. Integrated within the aforementioned sections are connections to the theories and research that were presented in Chapter Two. Finally, this chapter ends with student recommendations for teachers, my researcher recommendations for teachers and future research, and a concluding overall personal reflection.

Personal Narratives and One's Sense of Overall Identity

Identity as narratives.

The three students interviewed for this study articulated their strong sense of identity through a "discourse space" of personal narratives (Gee, 2001, p. 111). The personal narratives of Anna, Olivia and Sophia were also quite similar, as each girl believed that her identity is composed of a collection of *"characteristics."* They could be *"happy"* and *"energetic,"* but also *"sad"* and *"moody."* Each girl also articulated the same descriptive words when asked to explain how others would describe her. Gee (2001) and Sfard and Prusak (2005) state that it is in the repetition of the narratives surrounding one's identity, the words and phrases, that identities are created. Consistent with the findings of the research conducted by both Gee (2001) and Sfard and Prusak (2005), the three students in this study took on and adapted the narratives of others, or they themselves created these narratives that were then reiterated back to them. As Anzaldua (1999) argued, identities are clusters of stories (cited in Moje & Luke, 2009).

The consistency in the clusters of narratives the students told about themselves from varying viewpoints suggested that their identities are somewhat stable. In their study, Sfard and Prusak (2005) found that the more consistent the stories were surrounding an identity, the more likely the individual was to take on and "self-perpetuate" these motifs, whether or not they supported success or failure (p. 18). The repetitive narratives of the three female students being happy and bubbly, to moody and lazy, from parents, peers, teachers and themselves, concur with the findings of Sfard and Prusak (2005) as these stories became how Anna, Olivia and Sophia saw their personal identity. In the same way, narratives from their peers, parents and teachers and from themselves about their talents in the classroom were consistent, and helped to form their student identity. Perhaps, due to this consistency in how the students viewed the various parts of their identity, not one of the participants, when asked, stated that she would rather be someone else if given the chance. Each student believed that she could admire other people for certain characteristics they may like to have or develop, but none of the students would trade her identity for someone else's.

Mastery goals.

Although only Sophia seemed to be 100% sure what she wanted to do when she grew up, all the participants were very clear about their strengths and passions and how these aligned with potential career options. They all believed that the work they completed during school was connected and relevant in some way to preparing them for their futures, even if it may not seem relevant now. These findings are also consistent with the research of Sfard and Prusak (2005), who found a similar correlation in honours Israeli students between their strong sense of identity, clear goals for the future and

subsequent success in the classroom. These findings suggest a connection between the three states of being, although, more research is needed to explore a direct correlation.

Personal and social identities.

Participants varied in how they discussed and shared stories about their personal lives outside of school. Anna and Olivia were past students, and therefore had a rapport with me before I was the ‘researcher’. These two students seemed at ease immediately and readily shared many stories about their home lives that created a broader picture of who they are as siblings, daughters and individuals outside of the school setting. As a result their interviews were almost twice as long as Sophia’s. Sophia, who was new to the school environment, had also never met me before the interview, as either a teacher or a researcher. She provided small glimpses into her personal life, but often stopped telling these stories stating that she did not feel comfortable sharing them. This finding is significant as it demonstrates the importance of creating a trusting relationship with participants if researchers hope to be given access to participants’ private lives. Also, the difference among these interviews highlights the importance of the teacher-student connection. If teachers hope to create a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of their students, they must truly know the identities in their classroom. As witnessed in Hall’s (2007) study, when teachers did not know the true identities of their students the teachers made assumptions or judgments that did not reflect the reality of their students’ lives. These misjudgements led to missed opportunities that stagnated student growth and perpetuate negative identity constructs, such as the silenced or the struggling reader (Hall, 2007). If, as studies have shown (Hall, 2007; McCarthey, 2002; Sfard & Prusak,

2005) that students' identities are tied to their overall learning and experience of learning, then in order to accurately plan for the identities in our classrooms, teachers need to truly take the time to get to know students. Just one interview with Sophia did not provide enough time for me to understand her or her responses in the same depth that I was able to connect with and understand both Olivia and Anna. Therefore, not only as a researcher, but also as a teacher I learned the importance of taking the time to really get to know the identities in my classroom, so that I do not misjudge students and so that I can ensure that I am supporting them.

The Relationship between Student Narratives and Successful Reading Achievement

Self-efficacy.

Explicitly prominent in each of the case studies was an overall sense that each of the participants has a strong sense of self-efficacy in reading. Previous studies have shown that positive self-efficacy is connected with positive academic efficacy, which was present in each of these participants (Guthrie, 2008; McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Their positive academic efficacy seemed to be due to the fact that each participant knew what it meant to be a successful student and therefore she was able to endorse her standing or status as talented based on the fact that she held these characteristics. Anna, Olivia and Sophia were also motivated to continually read because they know they are good at it, they enjoy it, and they feel passionate and confident in sharing their views about the texts they read with peers and teachers. However, it was unclear if they were motivated with a performance goal or a mastery goal orientation (Guthrie, 2008). It seems, especially from the transcripts of Olivia and Sophia, that often the girls completed

the work necessary to perform the task, but were not always motivated internally to learn or challenge themselves during the task. These findings suggest, especially with Olivia and Sophia, that often the girls engaged in more superficial surface level work, instead of deeply processing the learning; Olivia stated that she often left work to the last minute, Sophia did not feel challenged, but liked having homework, and even Anna stated that she did not engage in or think deeply about reading material that she did not find interesting.

The three participants conveyed their awareness that they are good readers because they "*really like reading,*" they have good grades, they are "*quick*" or fast readers in comparison to their peers, and they understand what they read. These findings are consistent with the results of larger international surveys that found "interest in reading is a major indicator in scholastic performance" (Guthrie, 2008, p.17). The participants reiterated Anna's comment that "*a good reader enjoys reading"* otherwise "*you won't do it and you won't get better at it."* Anna, Olivia and Sophia engage in daily reading (for enjoyment at night to "*escape into someone else's world*" or for the attainment of knowledge for school) and find purpose in their reading. Similar to "identified motivation," these students had internalized their goals and purposes for reading by the fact that they attach some personal value to their reading (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005, p. 171). The connection between the participants' love, enjoyment and purpose for reading perpetuating further reading concurs with findings by others, such as Guthrie. Guthrie (2008) argued that together reading achievement and reading engagement "interact in a spiral" (p. 3); the more one reads and enjoys reading the more she will achieve in school, similar to the Mathew

Effect (Stanovich, 1986). Due to their positive experiences with reading, the participants also have a generally positive attitude towards reading, mostly in their outside of school reading. Positive experiences perpetuating positive attitudes for reading further support the findings from Petscher's (2010) meta-analysis of the relationship between attitudes and reading engagement. According to Petscher's analysis of research, the greatest predictor of future reading was a student's current attitude towards reading. Central to all the three participants' positive attitudes towards reading is their love for sharing their ideas or "*intense views*" about their reading with others, mostly peers. The latter highlights a central motivational factor for reading underlying all three of the participants: the opportunity to share their ideas with peers in a social environment.

Social motivation.

The significant role of social motivation in reading engagement found in this study concurs with the findings from Wentzel's (1996) survey of students with reading self-efficacy. Wentzel found that social motivation was the strongest predictor of sustained academic motivation when students were socially motivated to learn. All of the participants of my study stated that their favourite literacy activity was engaging in group discussions. The participants were socially motivated to participate in reading discussions because they were confident that their comprehension of the text was accurate, and that their understanding contained unique opinions and insights. For example, when defining herself as an active class participant Anna stated, *"I have some pretty intense views and have always felt the need to put my view into the story and out there."* The other two participants also thought that their readings of texts often

generated such important points or views that it was necessary for them to share their ideas with others. Olivia explained that she tried to share with her class how through the examples of the characters in *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965) her peers could take a reflective look at the social injustices occurring in their own grade, such as alienation and unjust judging. These findings also connect with Guthrie's (2008) explanation that during middle school students have a stronger psychological need to feel connected with their peers; a need that can accelerate their "academic literacy" (p. 49). Based on the transcripts, each girl thought that it was important to understand what she was reading well enough to be able to share her ideas succinctly and intelligently with her peers. Therefore, having the opportunity to be socially engaged about their learning worked to motivate these students to further their academic literacy.

Choice.

Beyond being socially motivated to read, Anna, Olivia and Sophia all identified choice as another motivating factor for reading. In the context of reading, Guthrie (2008) found that choice and self-direction were central in intrinsically motivating students for "deep reading" (p. 8). Rose's (2011) research also found that talented Grade 8 readers enjoyed "choice: freedom but with guidelines" in their assignments (p. 18). The participants in my study conveyed that they were not given choice of text options (such as novel, short story and poetry), and they had limited choice in how assignments were to be completed in their literacy classrooms. The only opportunity for text choice these participants experienced was in their out-of-school reading. Therefore when Anna, Olivia and Sophia were asked to discuss what they liked about in-school reading, their comments were about only those texts that had been assigned. The three participants

stated that they did not enjoy any of the texts that they had read in class during the year, except one, *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965). The girls stated that all of other novels, short stories, texts, and poetry that had been assigned were neither interesting nor engaging. However, each participant had a bursting list of out-of-school favourite readings, but all felt that most of their in-school reading was either "*dark*," "*lacking in plot*," and/or "*not engaging*." These negative attitudes towards their in-school reading are consistent with the research of McKenna and Kear (1990), who found that reading attitudes can influence student motivation and engagement. My participants, especially Olivia, stated that she could not fully engage in reading activities and assignments on texts that she did not find interesting. These findings may also add another dimension to the research conducted by Marcoulides et al. (2008) and Otis et al. (2005). Marcoulides et al. found that motivation trends in 13 year olds seemed to stabilize in all directions, while Otis et al. found that the type of motivation that seemed to most significantly drop was intrinsic motivation. To explain this drop in intrinsic motivation, Guthrie (2008) found that during middle school students begin to lose choice and control over their academic studies, including the texts they read. To increase intrinsic motivation Otis et al. found that students had to find value in what they learned. Therefore, the findings in this study concurred with the conclusions reached by Otis et al. and Guthrie as the girls conveyed that their overall intrinsic motivation dropped for reading when choice was absent. As Anna stated, when reading *The Snow Goose* (Gallico, 1940), "*I read the first couple paragraphs [and] then I started scanning it without paying attention. Then I realized what I was doing I had to go back and read it again.*" Unengaged by the material chosen for her, Anna had to continually restart her reading for understanding,

affecting her overall ability to truly engage with a novel that she, "*never really understood*." Perhaps the statistical information on the drop in intrinsic motivation generated from the data gathered by Marcouldies et al. was a reflection of this decrease in control and choice, and further studies should investigate how choice affects overall motivation and engagement in middle school.

The need to relate.

The strongest reason the participants stated for not connecting with the assigned texts was that they found the characters to be *"not relatable."* However, all of the participants mentioned characters in their out-of-school reading that they connected too, like Anna's connection to Tamora Pierce's series because she could identify with the main character's *"feminist"* ideologies. Relatable characters, for both Olivia and Sophia, were characters that were in transition or flux. This finding, about the importance of characters being relatable, concurs with the research by McCarthey and Moje (2002) who explored the connection between identity and literacy theories, and demonstrated how literacy activities can be sources or catalysts for identity construction and/or growth. Both Olivia and Sophia enjoyed *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965) because they could connect to and even learn from the characters. Olivia stated that she felt optimistic reading *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965) because it not only reflected larger social problems around her but also *"changed"* her personal outlook on life. After reading about Ponyboy watching sunsets, she described how she went home and like Ponyboy, watched a sunset to try and *"take time to appreciate"* the simple things in life. Sophia also connected with the characters in *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1965), for like Johnny she was *"frustrated"* with being in a stage of her life where she was stuck between understanding and not

understanding life. McCarthey and Moje (2002) argued that through the critique and analysis of characters in flux, literacy activities can help to shape identities or help students begin to "make sense of their worlds" (p. 228). Although it was not clear from the transcripts if the students connected and thought about these characters on their own, or were guided by their teachers to do so, what is evident is that similar to the findings of McCarthey and Moje, the characters in these books played a significant role in changing the thinking and identity of at least one of the three participants. It is also important to note that the participants seemed more comfortable talking to me about a character from their in-school reading, instead of their out-of-school reading. The latter may be due to the fact that they knew I could relate to or understand their reading and explanation of the character because I knew the literature they referenced. Both Olivia and Anna explained their connections to characters in their out-of-school reading but quickly dropped them when they knew that I could not fully understand the context of their explanations, as I was not familiar with the texts. It seemed important to both Olivia and Anna that I shared an understanding about their reflections, and therefore they spent more time talking about shared texts.

Student attitudes.

Choice also seemed to play a role in affecting overall student attitudes towards learning and for encouraging self-motivation in other aspects of the participants' academic lives. For instance, overall the girls stated that they had experienced a drop in general motivation to learn in Grade 8. Both Sophia and Olivia seemed to feel that other areas of their lives, such as peers, were becoming much more prominent. Sophia stated repeatedly that she talked a lot in class with her friends and knew that she would do

better if she were more focused. Olivia also thought that school was no longer as important as it used to be. In the past, she described that her parents would *"lecture"* her about doing well at school, but currently she felt that she was starting to see and make her own goals. School was still important, but not the central focus of her life. Although the change in the girls' attitudes to learning was not deeply investigated in this study, it was noticeable in the interview transcripts that school, especially for Olivia and Sophia, was not holding the same interest or significance that it once had in the past.

Student interest.

Logan and Johnston (2009), like many others researching attitudes related to reading, suggested that reading attitudes are "likely to influence children's regularity of independent reading, their level of involvement in class reading activities, the variety and range of reading topic chosen, their enjoyment of reading and possibly their reading achievement" (p. 199). The findings in my study concur in two of the areas identified by Logan and Johnston. Both Olivia and Sophia stated that they participate in class, but not always to levels that they had in the past, and that their enjoyment for reading in school was diminishing. Therefore, the girls' overall level of involvement and enjoyment for reading in-school was diminishing because they were losing interest, findings that are consistent with both Logan and Johnston and Petscher's (2010) research. Their interest in reading had also faded due to *"choice";* the three participants each stated on numerous occasions that often when a book or text was chosen for them they did not find it interesting or found it *"boring."* Ivey and Broaddus (2000) similarly reported that when asked, middle school students had many interests in reading, but often these interests or genres were not found in their schools (p. 69). The findings from my research also

suggest that more research is needed to explore how a change in reading attitudes affects the talented and why these changes occur in middle school. Also central in the identity narratives surrounding changes in motivation and engagement were the reoccurrence of the participants' beginning understanding that they had both public and private identities. In concurrence with the findings of Hall's research (2007) with struggling readers, Anna, Olivia and Sophia seemed to uphold the public identity or image of what they thought is a talented reader (by being attentive as much as possible in class or completing assignments on time), even though they were not perhaps fully engaged, challenged or interested.

For instance, Olivia acknowledged she was *"not challenged"* by teachers or activities. She described leaving assignments to the last minute, and completing them to a level that she knew would continue to give her the marks she wanted. Olivia stated that her parents and sometimes her teachers stated that she is *"lazy,"* but privately Olivia knew this assessment was untrue. Instead, because Olivia was neither engaged nor challenged, her lack of motivation affected her level of enjoyment and active involvement in her learning, similar to the findings of how the struggling readers used silence in Hall's (2007) study to protect their identity. Also, I would argue that Olivia's declining motivation concurs with McCoach and Siegle's (2003) findings that gifted underachievers may present a strong talented public identity, but lack "on the motivational/self-regulation faction and goal valuation factors" (p. 148). Without support or challenge from her teachers, Olivia will not motivate herself beyond her level of competency.

Public identities to protect private identities.

Sophia and Anna also used their public identities of being talented to protected parts of their private identities. For instance, Sophia defined her public student identity as being talented because she always earned good grades and can read quickly, but later stated that she was not sure why she is talented. Sophia could not comment about whether or not she felt challenged in the classroom because on many levels she was not sure why or even if she really is talented. Therefore, when defining herself as talented she used only those explanations or defining characteristics given to or placed upon her by others. Privately, based on the interview transcripts, it seemed that Sophia lacked confidence in her abilities as being *"talented"* in the literacy classroom. Anna, who publicly always appeared engaged and passionate about the literacy activities in classroom, privately shared that often she did not like the reading material and assignments, but she never shared these opinions in class. Therefore, Sophia and Anna, unlike Olivia, upheld the characteristics they believed as representing a talented or successful student, acting interested, engaged and challenged, when privately they were not. Olivia did not perpetuate these characteristics or identity traits when she privately did not feel challenged, engaged or motivated, therefore causing others, such as her teachers and parents, to inaccurately label her as lazy. These enactments and discrepancies between their public and private identities are also consistent with McCarthey's (2001) research. She found that if a student lacked self-confidence in a learning task, it was more likely that her/his public and private identity would not match. For the talented student, and for these three students in particular, I think based on my research the opposite is true. Confident in their abilities, when there was a mismatch

between the public and private identities of the talented reader it was generally due to a mismatch between what they needed to be challenged and engaged in the classroom and what they were experiencing in the classroom. When a mismatch occurred and their public identities as talented readers were not challenged, the girls either acted as though they were challenged, or enacted characteristics of laziness. However, none of the three students ever asked for challenge or found other ways to engage themselves in their learning, besides doing the tasks required of them and trying to find any opportunity to participate orally. This mismatch in what Anna, Olivia and Sophia needed and what they were receiving in the classroom connects directly to the role of their teachers and how they need to know the students as individuals to create learning experiences that are engaging for all.

The role of the teacher.

All of the participants described how teachers played a significant role in increasing their motivation for reading and overall learning. When Anna, Olivia and Sophia enjoyed the teacher, they enjoyed the class, even when they did not like the assignments. For instance, both Olivia and Sophia stated that they liked a new course this year, which they did not like in the past, due to the teacher. Important characteristics of the teachers they appreciated were that these teachers allowed students space to share their identity in class by engaging them in oral discussions and debates about what they were learning. Interestingly, not one of the participants commented on any written activities they enjoyed in connection to reading, which may connect to the limited choice in how assignments were completed. As Olivia stated, assignments without personal choice were *"stupid and boring,"* as they made her feel *"caged"* in by limited choices

for expression. In Olivia's opinion choice was important, but so too were structure and clear teacher expectations, so students knew *"where to start."* Similarly, Rose (2011) found that talented English learners wanted both choice in reading materials, and guidelines for assignments. Middle school students in her study stated that they needed to be engaged with choice, but guided with some structure that still allowed for flexibility. One student suggested freedom with guidelines "would expand the creativity aspect while make us [students] focus in on the goal" (Rose, 2011, p. 22).

Final commonalities.

Finally, a few other significant similarities between the participants' identities as talented readers were that their definitions of being a good student and reader were based on the skills they believed made them successful (which usually meant the skills they used to get an A). Using their perceived skills as a basis to make general judgments demonstrated, to some degree, how highly and confidently they held their own opinions as correct. In addition to reading quickly, Anna, Olivia and Sophia all agreed that reading was important for their overall future from getting through university to the reading of simple but necessary instructions. And, interestingly, all participants reported that everyone in their family read, when they could find the time.

A Talented Reader's Positioning in the Literacy Classroom

All of the participants, if not modest in describing their strengths and attributes, demonstrated reservation or lack of awareness when asked to describe how they thought they were positioned within the literacy classroom. When asked about the best reader in the class, Anna, Olivia and Sophia all stated that they are one of the top readers, but none identified themselves as the best. Olivia and Anna both stated that a

certain boy is the best reader, due to the volume of and speed at which he read, and Sophia was not sure as she felt she had not paid enough attention to comment accurately. The few comments made about this boy were the only comments made that directly positioned others in the girls' transcripts.

Positioning through the narratives of others.

Generally, the girls positioned the various parts of their identity, from talented readers to social beings, based on the comments or judgments made by others. Gee (2001) would argue that these judgments were "institutional labels" from our culture that work to define and label students in a certain position (p. 111). The participants supported the various definitions of parts of their identities based on what other people, mainly their peers, had told them. They each believed that others' perceptions were paramount in aiding them in the construction of their identity, however, the extent they relied on these perceptions varied, and were not overly clear in the transcripts, as they were not often aware of the impact that others had on their sense of self or identity construction. Sfard and Prusak (2005) found that repeated narratives about one's self, in this case as a talented reader, create a "self-perpetuating" effect (p. 18). However, Sfard and Prusak did not explain or account for how these narratives also positioned students. When asked how she knew she was a good reader, Anna explained that she could tell by comparing her actions to others in the classroom. For instance, when reading she did not *"read, look up, sigh, look around"* suggesting that those who did this behaviour either did not like or understand the activity. To Anna being a talented reader is *"obvious,"* as others know she is talented based on her participation and reading behaviours in the classroom. Anna's feeling of her talented positioning as being obvious in the literacy

classroom was also repeated in the narratives of Olivia and Sophia. They, too, stated that they knew they were talented because they compared marks in class or they used "*big words*," or their contributions during classroom discussions conveyed depth of thought. These examples demonstrate that although the participants were unaware at a conscious level that they may have been making these choices in the classroom to support their positioning as a talented reader, they were able to articulate that they knew they are talented through these actions and positionings.

Olivia, Sophia and Anna also knew that they are talented based on the comments made by their teachers. This finding concurs with the research of Skinner and Belmont (1993) who found that teachers were more likely to support and engage students who had "high behavioral engagement" (p. 578). To what extent the relationship these participants had with their teachers and how their teachers positioned the girls in the classroom affected their sense of identity as talented were not explored in this research. However, based on the students' comments about the importance and use of their teachers' perceptions in their sense of being talented, like the findings of Skinner and Belmont, the girls' teachers may have played a role in positioning them as talented. Anna, Sophia and Olivia participated and acted in class as a talented reader should.

Therefore, based on the transcripts, the participants seemed to position themselves as talented readers in two ways: by taking up the opinions and comments of others, and by constructing their own positionings. Harré and van Langenhove (1991) argue that one can position themselves based on the narratives of others that they decide to "take up" as their own, called *interactive positioning* (p. 395). The girls

relied on their peers, parents, teachers and report card comments to interactively position them as talented readers, however to what degree this type of positioning occurred was not measured in this study. Also, Anna, Olivia and Sophia reflexively positioned themselves by consciously or actively positioning their talented identity in the classroom; they shared their opinions, used sophisticated vocabulary and acted like a talented reader (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). Anna provided an excellent example of *reflexive positioning* when she passionately stated that she always shared her views with her peers in class because it positioned her as someone who was not someone who *"sits in the corner."* Anna's active participation during class contributed to creating and positioning her identity in the literacy classroom.

Positioning of social identities.

The positioning of their identities as talented readers and students was clear in the transcripts of the participants. Anna, Olivia and Sophia shared many examples of their academic talents through their narratives. However, when asked to speak about their social identities, the students were not always as consistent or confident. In the social sphere the positioning of their identities seemed less controllable and/or supportable with measures like a grade. For instance, Anna stated that her peers often misjudged her, which infuriated Anna because, according to her, their judgments were not based in reality. Anna believed that these peers did not know her or the various parts of her identity, and therefore she did not feel that their judgments were justified or valid. Anna was also not given opportunities to demonstrate parts of her true identity to them, outside of being a talented student in the classroom. In reviewing the transcripts and questions asked during this study, I believe that I needed to ask more

questions about the participants' social identity and the positioning of their identity outside of being a talented reader. Therefore, although I obtained a small glimpse into, for instance Anna's social identity, I do not believe I gained adequate information to develop a clear picture of all participants' social identities outside of the classroom. I think inclusion of various parts of the student's identity would be important for future research in this area. Providing a broader picture of the talented reader, outside of their positions and identities in the classroom and in the home, may also shed light on how various identities of one's self interact and/or inform each other.

Cross-case analysis.

In order to complete this detailed cross-case analysis, under the three main research questions, I created Table 4 (see below). To prepare for the development of this table I read through all of the case studies and the individual descriptions of each case in Chapter Four. This reading was similar to the "constant comparative analysis" (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 32) I completed for each individual case in Chapter Four, which included reading the data, creating categories that described the data, reanalyzing the data, recreating categories, and then comparing the categories. The findings from Table 3 were used to create Table 4 with further details and examples for each level of data. To highlight the various intricacies across the cases I provided myself with room in the table to jot notes around each category, so that I could identify the specifics of each case. This illustration and explanation of how I analyzed the cases in a cross-case analysis is important to demonstrate publicly in order to increase the trustworthiness of my research (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002).

This process revealed few differences between and among the cases. Similar themes were evident in each case and the differences found among the cases lay in the specifics. For example, it was clear from creating this table that Anna, in comparison to Olivia and Sophia, did not have as strong of a sense of an identity outside of the realm of being a talented reader.

Cross-case Analysis of the Three Cases

Table 4

Themes Identified Across the Transcripts of the Three Case Studies

Themes	Anna	Olivia	Sophia
1. Personal narratives and one's sense of self:			
a. Strong sense of self	a. Yes	a. Yes	a. Yes
b. Clear future goals	b. Area clear	b. Area clear	b. Museum curator
c. Personal lives shared – openness	c. Very open	c. Very open	c. Not open – new student to me
2. Relationship between identity narratives and academic success:			
a. Strong self-efficacy	a. Clear definition of good student.	a. Clear definition of good student	a. Clear definition of good student.
b. Positive attitude towards learning	b. Very positive attitude; thinks one must enjoy reading to be a good reader, even if slow.	b. Loves reading, reading fast to get information important to definition.	b. Loves reading; reads fast.
c. Motivations behind reading	c. Self-motivated, did not like in-class reading except for one book; loves discussions.	c. Not motivated or challenged by teachers; teachers thinks she is lazy when she does not motivate self.	c. Slightly motivated; did not like in-class reading; likes school work; not challenged – could work harder; enjoys

			time in class to read and write; talkative.
d. Identity + literacy = connecting to literature by identifying with characters.	d. Favorite series by Tomara Pierce; has a character who is the similar to her feminist, powerful, influential; chooses books based on her mood - has to fit how she is feeling that day.	d. Main character must be relatable; needs to feel like she sees and experiences the book through eyes of character; reading gives her insight into her life, *"open up to see that other people have problems and that our class is like that and that it does not have to be like";* moods also influence reading and choices; took time to appreciate the simple parts of life because Johnny did.	d. Liked one book in-class; favourite in-class character Johnny because he cares about family, also his character is in transition from not fully understanding to understanding life; like Sophia who doesn't *"understand" everything"*; a state that *"frustrates"* both Johnny and Sophia.
3. Talented reader's positioning in the literacy classroom:			
a. Modest positioning	a. Modest positioning;	a. Modest positioning;	a. Not sure what others are doing

of self	reads fast and finishes before others.	knows she reads fast.	in literacy classroom, but she is a fast reader; compares marks.
b. Peer influence	b. Frustrated with others judging her before they know her.	b. Really enjoys her peers this year.	b. Peers number one both inside and outside of school.
c. Identities outside of being talented not as strong to developing	c. Identity not as strong outside of reading/school; spends lots of time in library reading.	c. Building a strong identity outside of schoolwork new for her; making her own choices for extra activities.	c. Creating strong friendships this year.

Summary of Cross-Case Analysis

The analysis of the data revealed three important findings that address the overall research question of, "What is the relationship between identity and reading success for the talented reader?" Firstly, the three participants in this study have a strong sense of self-efficacy in the literacy classroom that seemed to contribute to their overall identity and success. The transcripts revealed that the following factors contributed to the participants' overall academic self-efficacy: a clear sense of their identity in the classroom, a strong connection and relationship with family members who believed that reading is important, a cohesion between the perceptions' of others and themselves as learners (through stories and grades), a positive attitude towards

learning, and a general sense that there was a purpose to most of the learning that occurred in the literacy classroom, outside of obtaining grades.

Secondly, in direct connection to two of the theoretical frameworks in which this study was situated, motivational and identity-literacy theories, the findings suggested that the participants' experiences and identities were central to their success within the classroom. For these participants motivation was connected to interest in, choice of, and social engagement in their reading materials and activities. Central to the participants' academic motivation was their "belief system" that learning had a purpose (Wentzel, 1996, p. 392). Although all participants acknowledged that they believed that what they were currently learning was laying the foundation or "*basics*" for future learning, their central motivational purpose, at the time of the interviews, was socially driven. Students shared in their interviews that when they were able to socially and orally share their opinions and ideas with their peers, they were more engaged within the classroom and the lesson (Guthrie, 2008). The girls were further motivated when their identities were addressed in the classroom. For these students incorporating identities involved having text choices that they could relate to, being given time and space to discuss and share their ideas, and being recognized and understood by teachers. Anna, Olivia and Sophia conveyed that they had only some "choice" in their literacy classrooms through their active participation in discussions, where they were free to voice their identities and opinions. Otherwise, in most other literacy activities they felt "*caged*" by the choices of teachers. Also, none of the girls mentioned that any of their teachers really knew their true identity. According to the girls, the teachers

they would learn parts of their identity, but would never take the time to fully get to know who they are both inside and outside of the classroom. Although the girls did not see the latter as problematic, this lack of connection may have contributed to why the materials and lessons used in the classroom did not connect with the identities of these participants.

Finally, the three participants positioned themselves as talented readers through their oral participation in the literacy classroom, which may also suggest that the recognition they sought the most was that of their peers. However, as Davis and Harré (1990) found in their research, not all positionings are intentional. Thus, to what degree these students knew how and why they were positioning themselves as talented in the classroom was not discovered.

Overall, for Anna, Olivia and Sophia, their perceived identities as talented readers were connected to their success in the literacy classroom. However, the findings suggested that being talented in reading did not mean that these students self-motivated and/or always challenged themselves to do their best. Both Olivia and Sophia seemed to complete the work necessary to appease their teachers or receive the grades they and others expected of them. Like most middle school students, these participants were transitioning from following the expectations of their teachers and parents to listening more to their own voices and motivations (Guthrie, 2008; Moje & Luke, 2009; Reis et al., 2005). Peer approval and acceptance were important themes for all of the participants, as too was the importance of be interested in and connected to the work that was assigned and completed in the classroom. Therefore, the interviews of Anna, Olivia and Sophia emphasized the importance of teachers taking

time to give students voice in classrooms, so that true identities and needs can be realized, minimizing the chances of missed opportunities for learning and growth.

Recommendations

In the following sections I outline the recommendations for teachers shared by Anna, Olivia and Sophia during their interviews, as well as my own recommendations for teachers and future research. I conclude this chapter with my personal reflections about how this project unfolded and what I learned by completing it.

Students' Recommendations to Teachers

Time:

- Students need time in and out of class to think about what they have read by analyzing and comparing the new ideas with what they already know and then mindfully responding.
- Students value time, without restrictions, to read during class.

Choice:

- Middle school students can be guided to make reading choices based on emotions. Therefore, students should be provided with choice or the option to pick up another book when the one they are currently reading is not working for them.
- Students dread assigned reading most of all in school reading.
- Students need choice in assignment options that allow them to be creative and use other modes of representing, but also that have clear guidelines.

Student Identity:

- Talented students need to be challenged by their teachers and peers; they might not always challenge themselves.
- It is important to connect with and get to know students in order to learn what they like and dislike in reading choices, as every class of students is different.
- Students' favourite reading activity was classroom discussions as it provided them with the opportunity to express themselves freely. Discussions do not always need to be teacher-led.
- Students need to have a safe place to share what they are reading. The participants stated that they often did not know what others were reading, and enjoyed sharing what they were reading with their peers.
- Participants wanted to be able to relate to what they are reading. The characters or situations do not have to be identical to their own, but students need a point of entry into characters' lives. Students also need some scaffolding to assist them in connecting with or understanding characters' lives that are dissimilar to their own.
- Talented students really do like reading. To be passionate and engaged they need to enjoy what they are learning or at least feel like the exercise is purposeful and worthwhile.

Researcher Recommendations for Teachers Based on Student Recommendations and Findings

Two very important suggestions for teachers emerged from the student voices in this research. Firstly, these talented students demonstrated and stated that all

students need to be challenged. The findings of the research highlight how the talented attributes of each student varied and that each student had different strengths and areas needing work, just like any other student in the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to connect with the individuals in their classrooms, so that they know how to personally challenge each individual student. A way to challenge students while accounting for personal differences, as suggested by Olivia, is to create assignments that have a section that allows for personal additions or criteria to be added by the student or collaboratively by the teacher and student. Providing an area for personal flexibility within a somewhat structured assignment can facilitate a sense of student autonomy and build student interest. Further, student autonomy also creates a sense of accountability. To intrinsically motivate students they need to find value in their assignments, their work needs to connect to their identity and it needs to challenge them. As Guthrie (2008), Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier (2005) and Wentzel (1996) found, the goal is to motivate students to internally value the work they do in school because this motivation can contribute to future intrinsic motivation for more general tasks, such as mastering certain skills to fostering an overall zest for continued future learning.

Secondly, as suggested in the review of literature, the use of reading inventories can be helpful to teachers to develop an understanding of the reading realities of students and their overall attitudes towards reading. For example, McCoach and Siegle (2003) used the School Attitude Assessment Survey-R to understand student attitudes, motivations and goal orientations of under-achieving and high-achieving gifted students. Such inventories would be useful in the classroom for

teachers to better understand their students' interests and motivations, so that teachers can create curricular activities that connect and build from their students' interests to promote a more positive attitude towards overall reading. As Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found, when there is a mismatch between what students need and the instruction they receive, motivation drops. Therefore, as teachers we need to address our students' needs in order to motivate and promote learning for all students.

Researchers Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the talented reader's identity and their success in reading. Since this study included only three participants, all of whom were female and students at the same private school, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population of talented students. Therefore, further qualitative research in this area could include more students with varying personal and demographic backgrounds. Also, as suggested by McCarthey (2001) and Gee (2001), in order to develop a holistic sense of one's identity, the perspectives of others need to be included. Only the talented students' perspectives were included and therefore this research did not explore whether or not the girls had a realistic sense of what others thought of them. Nor were the students observed to compare how their narratives about their identities matched their acted out realities. Therefore, further studies that included the perspectives of others and observations of students in their learning environment could add to how identities are formed, supported and challenged through literacy activities. It would also be interesting to understand how and why others, such as peers, parents and teachers, position talented readers, as these positionings may also have some lasting effects on talented students and their sense of

identity. And finally, this research project was first envisioned after I read the research of Marcoulides et al. (2008), who found that during middle school years most students did not increase their levels of motivation, and gifted students reportedly dropped at least 34% in motivation. I think further research needs to explore what causes students, especially talented or gifted students, to lose their motivation for learning in middle school. Although the three students in this study made some suggestions as to why this drop in motivation may occur, a study that focused solely on this question and that included student voices may add further insight to guide teachers of the talented student.

Beyond the limitations of my own study, this research left me with further questions about how identities work in literacy classrooms for all students. For instance, research that explored the following questions would contribute to current knowledge about identity-literacy theory:

- How do the various identities within one's self affect one's overall learning?
- How aware are students of their identity/ies and its/their connection to learning?
- How could the teaching or awareness of positioning theory affect the social aspects of learning for students in the literacy classroom?
- How do students learn about their identity or challenge their identities through the critical analysis of fictional characters? What literacy activities would facilitate and support such an analysis?

The field of research into identity-literacy theory and positioning theory (in relation to learning) is fairly new (Moje & Luke, 2009) and much more research is needed to explore how the link between identity and literacy can empower deeper learning and self development, both inside and outside of the classroom, essentially studying the affects of student learning when students are metacognitively aware.

Personal Reflections

Most importantly, by conducting this research I have been reminded of the importance of hearing student voices in the classroom. Central to my 'newbie teaching' pedagogy when I began my teaching career was the idea that as a literacy teacher my role was to support the identities that flourished in my classroom to be their best selves. I had envisioned that in order for students to accomplish the latter goal that they needed critical thinking tools to read, write and express who they are and what they think. However, through my journey as a teacher, my intentions have been redirected to worries over such issues as increasing FSA scores and/or searching for next best literature circle technique. Anna, Olivia and Sophia reminded me of the wisdom that students hold in the classroom. They reminded me of the importance of giving students voice and time to talk in class in a space that is not always led by my goals. Perhaps my purpose is more about creating the right space for students, through experience and interaction, where they can learn skills that I can never "lecture" into them. The students' transcripts reminded me of the power of student choice in reading and the importance of social goals (to them) for learning. Also, through the review of literature I learned that perhaps teachers must scaffold students in understanding that they do not always need to empathize or connect with the characters they are reading

about. Moje and Luke (2009), argue that students need some characters to relate too, but also need to identify how to find difference, so that they can also see the various parts of their own identities and how they are culturally, socially or independently created. Lewis and Ketter's (2008) theoretical approach to literature that focuses on students finding difference and not always reading for commonalities or with an empathetic mind will be a new area of professional development and exploration as I return to the classroom in September. Also, I believe that I need to continue reading about how gender affects learning and how gendered identities are enacted in the literacy classroom. As Moss (2008) highlighted in her review of current literature in the area of gender and literacy, boys and girls have different interests in the literacy classroom. My preference for certain narratives or activities could favour certain genders over others, such as narrative fiction favouring the female reader. Understanding how my choices affect the identities in my classroom is important, and again returns to the argument of getting to know one's students and giving students choice in the classroom, so that their interests are included.

Overall, I believe that I have become a wiser teacher due to my experience in conducting this research. The lessons that I have learned have re-grounded me to focus on what is most important in the classroom. To McCarthey and Moje (2002), who asked, "Why does identity matter in literacy education?" I would answer with a quote from Anna who believes that "*everyone should be their own person.*" If I hold Anna's truth, then I cannot expect to teach each and every student the same, with the same texts and the same assignments. My job is not to create one type of student, to "*warp the personalities*" of my students to fit one mould. My job is to teach students to be

independent thinkers with the skills to be successful and wise in the world outside my classroom, to create a path that leads students like Sophia from not understanding, to knowing. As "from Vygotsky's (1934/1986) perspective literacy is a tool for the development of mind, and it is in the development of mind that the self comes into being" (as citied by Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 426). This research has reignited my purpose as a teacher and I hope that I always hold the truths of Olivia, Anna and Sophia with me as a reminder that each September I must learn about my new students and their truths, so that their identities will be free and challenged to grow and "come into being" in my classroom.

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Appendix A

University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethic’s Committee Approval

Appendix B

Director Consent Form

Dear [redacted],

The intent of this letter is to inform you about the objectives of my research study titled "Identity and Engaging the Talented Reader" that I wish to conduct at [redacted] [redacted] in the spring of 2011 and how it may benefit the talented readers in our school. This research study is also part of the requirements for my Master of Education Degree in Curriculum and Instruction and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo.

Purpose and Objectives

My study will investigate the relationship between the identities of talented readers and their overall reading success in Language Arts. My research will also investigate if talented readers are aware of how their identities are positioned in the Language Arts classroom, and if there is a relationship between their positioning and their overall success.

Participant Selection

I have chosen to select students from [redacted] for two important reasons. Firstly, as an employee I aware that within the target Grade 8 student population there are many students who meet the criteria of a talented reader. For this study a talented reader is defined as those students whose reading scores on the February 2010 Grade 7 FSA exceeded expectations in the areas of understanding, decoding and comprehending reading passages. Secondly, as a former English teacher of many of these students, I believe that some of our talented students are not always challenged to their full potential. I hope that in conducting this

study I can find new ways to improve my own practice at this specific school and for the specific demographic of the students we teach.

Importance of this Research

Much of the research in the area of reading success and achievement has focused on what motivates students to promote their own self-efficacy and interest in reading. Although some of this research acknowledges and takes into account the multifaceted nature of learning, the identities of students have not been considered in many studies. Recent research has revealed a relationship among students' identities and overall learning; therefore, researchers and educators are now acknowledging the importance of constructing and deconstructing the identities of students in the classroom.

Researching the talented reader is important because most research on reading achievement focuses on the underachieving reader. Past research on talented students has found that as this population of students moves through their middle school years many begin to lose both interest and their giftedness in learning. Findings from my research may highlight new ways in which educators and researchers can further support and challenge talented readers during their middle school years. Insights gained from this research may also contribute to understanding how other readers of varying levels can be supported through additional identity-literacy research.

What is Involved

To obtain my participants I will need to ask a third party to invite participants due to my past relationship with students. A third party limits the chances that I may inadvertently coherence students to participate. I suggest that , the school administrative assistant, as the third party as she has access to all student email addresses, but not relationship with the students academically. Her role would be to send the invitation email to all grade 8 students. Students are then to reply to her if they meet the talented reader criteria and would like to learn more about the study. The email will have consent forms attached for the students and their parents to read explaining the study in its entirety. The interview questions that the participants will be asked will also be attached to the email. I therefore request your permission to have send the invitation email to the grade 8 students and for me to reply to students who express interest through email contact. I also request your permission to use the school grounds to conduct my interviews during non-instructional periods of the spring term. I have also attached copies of the email invitation, student consent form, parent consent form and interview questions for your approval.

I will interview students who volunteer to participate in this study, during a non-instructional period of the school day. During this interview the students will be asked a series of questions about their identity as a reader and their literacy practices. There is the potential that all interview questions will not be answered in one meeting time, and therefore I may need to meet more than once with the students. Once all the questions have been answered their responses will be digitally recorded and used as data to begin to answer my research questions that focus on exploring the relationship between identity and literacy success for the talented reader. My hope is to interview between 3 to 5 students.

The overall time commitment for each participant for the initial interview is approximately 45-minutes. I also anticipate needing to meet with each interviewee one more time, for 20 minutes, to read their interview transcripts to them to ensure accuracy and obtain final consent to use their transcripts in my project.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to any of the participants by participating in this research.

Voluntary Participation

All participants must participate in this research voluntary. Students will have the option to withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. To withdraw from the study they must email me directly at taitkimberly@gmail.com and ask to be withdrawn. If they do withdraw their data will destroyed and not used unless they give permission for me to do so.

All participants also have the option to refrain from answering any question asked of them without an explanation.

Anonymity

In terms of anonymity, all participants and the school will be given a pseudonym in any documentation or reporting of this study.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the students, the school and the data will be protected by ensuring that all digital recordings of interviews and transcripts, as well as consent forms, are locked in a filing cabinet at my house, unless in use by myself. Files containing transcripts, data analysis and my final project will be password protected on my personal computer, accessible only to myself.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through a final project and an oral defense and presentation. I also hope to present to the staff the study's findings at the end of the research, as I believe that it will help inform our practice at [redacted]

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of by erasing the digital tapes, and all other electronic data when the project is completed. Any paper documentation such as field notes and transcripts will be shredded.

Contacts

Individuals who may be contacted regarding this study include myself, Ms. Tait, at taitkimberly@gmail.com or 250-744-9027 and my supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo at pantaleo@uvic.ca or 250-721-7845.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

____________________	____________________	__________
Name of Director	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix C

Email to Potential Participants

Dear Parent of Potential Student Participant,

The purpose of this email is to invite your child to participate in a research study titled, "Identity and Engaging the Talented Reader" that I will be conducting during the next few months at [redacted].

Your child is invited to participate in this study if they meet one of the following criterion of a *talented reader*: a student, whose reading scores on the February 2010 Grade 7 FSA exceeded expectations in the areas of understanding, decoding and comprehending reading passages OR a student who currently holds an A (87-100%) in English 8.

To understand what is involved by participating in this study please read the attached consent forms that outline the study and its requirements. Please know that your child's participation in this study must be completely voluntary. It is also important for you to know that your child's academic grades will in no way be affected by your decision to have them participate or not to participate in this study.

If you would like your child to participate in the study, you and your child must read the student consent form, parent consent form and interview questions. It is important

that you read the interview questions carefully and are both comfortable with them if you wish to participate in the study.

If your child meets with one or both of the criterion listed above of a *talented reader* and you are comfortable with the interview questions, please email me directly at taitkimberly@gmail.com, with a brief note indicating your interest in the study. In your email please provide a time between Monday-Friday, during non-instructional hours at school, of when and where I could meet with your child to further discuss the study (e.g., lunch hour in your homeroom classroom).

To the meeting please have your child bring the attached student consent form and any questions that they (and you) may have about the study. You may also attend the meeting with your child (or email me) if you have any questions. You do not need to sign the consent forms before this meeting. By meeting with me your child is in no way stating that they have volunteered to participate in the study. The meeting is to discuss and answer any possible questions they may have about the study. If, after the meeting, your child would like to volunteer for the study, both the signed student and parent consent forms need to be brought to the initial interview.

Your child's participation in the study will include one 45-minute interview, although we may need to meet a second time to finish the questions. Your child will also need to attend one follow up meeting to review the transcripts from their interview when their consent will again be requested to allow me to use their data. All of these

meetings will occur at school, and will be set up by your child and myself in coordination with their teachers, to ensure that they do not miss any important learning.

Thank you for taking time to read this invitation and I look forward to meeting with potential participants.

Sincerely,

Ms. Kimberly Tait

Attached: Student Consent Form, Parent Consent Form and Interview Questions.

Appendix D

Student Consent Form

Identity and Engaging the Talented Reader

Dear Student,

This letter is addressed to students who meet with one of the following criteria of a talented reader. A talented reader, for the purposes of this study, will be defined as a student who either received an exceeding expectation score in the areas of understanding, decoding and comprehending reading passages on the February 2010 FSA assessment, as reported in your spring report card last year, or a student who is currently receiving an A (87-100%) in English 8.

If you believe you meet either of the above criteria, please consider being a part of my study titled "Identity and Engaging the Talented Reader" that I, Ms. Kimberly Tait, am conducting. As many of you know, I am currently on maternity leave from . I am also a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. As a graduate student, this research is part of the requirements for a Master of Education Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo.

Purpose and Objectives

My study will investigate the relationship between the identities of talented readers and their overall reading success in Language Arts. Identity refers to how you, as a student and individual, see yourself. Therefore, I will ask you questions about what attributes,

characteristics, values, activities and beliefs are important to you and how this understanding about who you are contributes or does not contribute to your success in English and reading?

Importance of this Research

Much of the research in the area of reading success and achievement has focused on what motivates students to promote their own self-efficacy and interest in reading. More recently, research in the area of reading is acknowledging the importance of getting to know who students are in the classroom and how student identities are connected to their learning. For example, how important is it for you as a student to feel like your voice is heard in the classroom, such as having an opportunity to provide input into the types of assignments you complete or texts you read? As a teacher of many talented students, I want to understand how I can motivate and challenge the readers in my classroom to assist them to reach their full potential. Therefore, through this study and your participation, I hope to learn more about how identity is connected to learning.

What is Involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your involvement will include one individual interview with myself. During this interview you will be asked a series of questions about who you are as a reader, student and individual (e.g., What genres do you like to read? What afterschool activities are important to you?) A list of the questions you will be asked is attached along with this consent form. Please read through all of the questions before you agree to volunteer for the study. Also, note that you have the right to refuse to answer any question asked during the interview without having to explain your reasoning. You may also ask me any questions you may have about the interview before you sign the consent form.

Once you have met with me to discuss the interview and study, I will schedule a lunch time meeting to conduct the interview. Please be aware, that although I hope to conduct the interview in one lunch hour period, we may need an additional time to complete all of the questions. You must bring your signed consent form and your parent's signed consent form to the interview. Your entire interview will be digitally recorded and used as data to begin to answer my research questions that focus on exploring the relationship between identity and literacy success for the talented reader. Written notes will also be taken during the interview. A transcription of your interview will be made available to you so that you may ensure that the transcription accurately represents the information you provided during the interview. Thus, the overall time commitment includes a 45-minute individual interview session, to be conducted at [redacted] during lunchtime, with the possibility of needing an additional lunch hour session to complete all of the questions. Also, you will need to attend a follow-up lunchtime meeting, approximately 20 minutes in length, to read your interview transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including two lunchtime periods to be interviewed and to check the accuracy of the transcripts from your interview.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include learning about your identity as a student and a reader. At the same time you will be given the opportunity to be

self-reflective about why you make the academic and personal reading choices that you do and what these choices communicate about you as a student and an individual. Your participation may also benefit the educational community because by sharing your experiences, educators will learn more about the relationship between student identity and the positioning of identities with literacy development and success. Therefore, other middle school students may benefit from the lessons learned by your participation in the study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. You can withdraw from the study by emailing me directly at taitkimberly@gmail.com and asking to be withdrawn. If you do withdraw your data will destroyed and not used unless you give me written permission to do so. Also, please note that your decision to participate in this study will in no way affect your grades or how you are treated at the school. Although the research will be conducted at the school, it is in no way related to your academic career there.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

I may have a relationship with you (the potential participant) as a past Grade 7 teacher at ███ ██████████████████. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps have been taken. Your invitation to the study came through a third party, the school administrative assistant ███████. Therefore, you can decline and/or accept the invitation without directly contacting me. In the initial e-mail it was stated that declining or accepting the invitation to participate in the research will in no way affect your academic career or grades at ██████████████████████. All information discussed during

the interviews will not be repeated directly with other teachers or participants at the school. All information will be confidential and shared using pseudonyms in the final project.

On-going Consent

When we meet for you to review the transcription of your interview, you will be asked to initialize this consent form to indicate your continued participation in the study. You will also be asked to initialize the transcriptions of your interview as consent for them to be used and quoted in my project.

Anonymity

In terms of anonymity, you will be given a pseudonym in any documentation or reporting of this study. The school will also be given a pseudonym.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by ensuring that all digital recordings of interviews and transcripts, as well as consent forms, are locked in a filing cabinet at my house, unless in use by myself. Files containing transcripts, data analysis and my final project will be password protected on my personal computer, accessible only to myself.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through a final project and an oral defense and presentation. Another presentation of the study's findings will be made to the staff at [redacted].

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of by erasing the digital tapes, and all other electronic data when the project is completed. Any paper documentation such as field notes and transcripts will be shredded.

Contacts

Individuals who may be contacted regarding this study include myself, Ms. Tait, at taitkimberly@gmail.com or 250-744-9027 and my supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo at pantaleo@uvic.ca or 250-721-7845.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

_____________________	_____________________	__________
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E

Parent Consent Form

Identity and Engaging the Talented Reader

Dear Parent of Student Participant,

This letter is addressed to parents/guardians whose child/student meets with one of the following criteria of a talented reader. A talented reader, for the purposes of this study, will be defined as a student who either received an exceeding expectation score in the areas of understanding, decoding and comprehending reading passages on the February 2010 FSA assessment, as reported in your spring report card last year, or a student who is currently receiving an A (87-100%) in English 8.

If you believe your child meets with either of the above criteria, please consider them as a potential participant in my study titled "Identity and Engaging the Talented Reader" that I, Ms. Kimberly Tait, am conducting. As many of you know, I am currently on maternity leave from [redacted]. I am also a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. As a graduate student, this research is part of the requirements for a Master of Education Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo.

Purpose and Objectives

My study will investigate the relationship between the identities of talented readers and their overall reading success in Language Arts. Identity refers to how your son or daughter sees

themself (identifies) as a student and individual. Therefore, I will ask your son or daughter questions about what attributes, characteristics, values, activities and beliefs are important to them and how this understanding about who they are contributes or does not contribute to their success in English and reading?

Importance of this Research

Much of the research in the area of reading success and achievement has focused on what motivates students to promote their own self-efficacy and interest in reading. More recently, research in the area of reading is acknowledging the importance of getting to know who students are in the classroom and how student identities are connected to their learning. For example, how important is it for your child, as a student, to feel like their opinions and voice is heard in the classroom, such as having an opportunity to provide input into the types of assignments they complete or texts they read? This research is important to me, as a teacher of many talented students, I want to understand how I can motivate and challenge the readers in my classroom to assist them to reach their full potential. Therefore, through this study and your child's participation, I hope to learn more about how identity is connected to learning.

What is Involved

If you agree to allow your child to voluntarily participate in this research, their involvement will include one individual interview with myself. During this interview they will be asked a series of questions about who they are as a reader, student and individual (e.g., What genres do you like to read? What afterschool activities are important to you?) A list of the questions your child will be asked is attached along with this consent form. Please read through all of the questions before you agree to volunteer for the study. Also, note that your child has the right to refuse to answer any questions asked during the interview without having to explain their

reasoning. You and your child may also ask me any questions you may have about the interview before you sign the consent form.

Once your child (and you if you would like) have met with me to discuss the interview and study, I will schedule a lunch time meeting to conduct the interview. Please be aware, that although I hope to conduct the interview in one lunch hour period, we may need an additional time to complete all of the questions. Your child must bring their signed consent form and your parent/guardian signed consent form to the interview. Your child's entire interview will be digitally recorded and used as data to begin to answer my research questions that focus on exploring the relationship between identity and literacy success for the talented reader, as noted above. Written notes will also be taken during the interview. A transcription of your child's interview will be made available for them to read over so that they can ensure that the transcription accurately represents the information they provided during the interview. Thus, the overall time commitment includes a 45-minute individual interview session, to be conducted at St. Michaels University School during lunchtime, with the possibility of needing an additional lunch hour session to complete all of the questions. Also, I will need to meet with your child for a follow-up lunchtime meeting, approximately 20 minutes in length, to read over their interview transcripts with them to ensure accuracy.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If your child decides to participate, they may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation.

They can withdraw from the study by emailing me directly at taitkimberly@gmail.com and asking to be withdrawn. If your child does withdraw their data will destroyed and not used unless they give me written permission to do so. Also, please note that your decision to allow your child to participate in this study will in no way affect your child's grades or how they are treated at the school. Although the research will be conducted at the school, it is in no way related to your child's academic career at the school.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

I may have a relationship with your child (the potential participant) as a past Grade 7 teacher at St. Michaels University School. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision (or your child's decision) to participate, the following steps have been taken. The invitation to the study came through a third party, the school administrative assistant Ms. Davis. Therefore, your child could decline and/or accept the invitation without directly contacting me. In the initial e-mail it was stated that declining or accepting the invitation to participate in the research will in no way affect your child's academic career or grades at St. Michaels University School. All information discussed during the interviews will not be repeated directly with other teachers or participants at the school. All information will be confidential and shared using pseudonyms in the final project.

On-going Consent

When I meet with your child to review the transcription of their interview, they will be asked to initialize their consent form to indicate their continued participation in the study. They will also be asked to initialize the transcriptions of their interview as consent for them to be used and quoted in my project.

Anonymity

In terms of anonymity, your child will be given a pseudonym in any documentation or reporting of this study. The school will also be given a pseudonym.

Confidentiality

Your child's confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by ensuring that all digital recordings of interviews and transcripts, as well as consent forms, are locked in a filing cabinet at my house, unless in use by myself. Files containing transcripts, data analysis and my final project will be password protected on my personal computer, accessible only to myself.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through a final project and an oral defense and presentation. Another presentation of the study's findings will be made to the staff at St. Michaels University School.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of by erasing the digital tapes, and all other electronic data when the project is completed. Any paper documentation such as field notes and transcripts will be shredded.

Contacts

Individuals who may be contacted regarding this study include myself, Ms. Tait, at taitkimberly@gmail.com or 250-744-9027 and my supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo at pantaleo@uvic.ca or 250-721-7845.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Student Participant: ____

______________________________	______________________________	________________
Name of Parent/ Guardian	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix F

Interview Questions

A. Identity Questions:

1. How would you describe yourself to someone who has never met you? ** How do you know that your description of yourself is accurate?
2. Tell me about some of the events that stand out for you as significant, memorable or life changing moments in your life, which you feel comfortable sharing. **
3. Tell me about school. (How do you like school? What is your favorite subject? Least favorite subject? Why?) *
4. Tell me how significant or insignificant you believe these subjects are to your life?
5. Tell me about what you do when you are not in school. (What things are you good at?) *
6. If you could be anyone in the world, who would that be? Why? *
7. Who is the person you most admire in the world? Why? *
8. Tell me about what kind of student you think you are? How do you know? Who tells you?
9. Do you know what you would like to be when you grow up? If so, what and why do you think you would like this future for yourself? Has anyone influenced your ideas for you future – how?

B. Family Questions:

1. What kinds of things do you do as a family? Favourite traditions? *
2. What kind of work do your parents do? *
3. What do they do when they are not working? *
4. Who in your family reads? Do they read for pleasure, information, learning or another reason? What types of text does that person read? *
5. Do any of the members of your family have future goals for you? What are they and how do you know?
6. Do your parents tell you stories about yourself as a younger child that they repeat? Do you have any you wish to share? On what occasions or when do you remember them telling these types of stories? Why do you think these stories would be of interest to me?
7. Do you have a nickname that your parents or other family members call you? What is the name and how did it come into use?
8. Are there any lessons that your parents have taught you that stand out for you as being moments you either remember clearly or have changed how you behave or believe? Can you remember some occasions when these lessons may have come up? Why would these lessons have been important to you at this time?

C. Others' perceptions

1. If your parents were to describe you to a stranger how would they describe your personality and personal traits? What describing words do you think they would use?** Are there any occasions that you can remember when you have heard one of your parents tell a story about you to someone else, or heard from someone a story they told about you? Can you share this story? Do you think that they represented you the way you see yourself? Please explain.
2. If your English teacher was to describe what kind of student you are in the classroom what words would they use? ** If she/he was to use stories to express what kind of student you are, which occasions or experiences with you in the classroom do you think that she/he would share and why? Is your teacher's opinion of you important? Explain why or why not.
3. If your peers, in your English class, were to describe you to a stranger how would they describe you? What descriptive words would they use? What kind of student would they say you are? How would they know this? Are their opinions important to you? Explain why or why not.
4. Why do you think I, as a researcher, would be interested in the opinions and stories of your parents, teacher and peers have about you? Do you think their opinions or definitions of who you are will be different or the same as your own? Why or why not?
5. Is there another important person in your life? How would that person describe you? *
6. Is there any other person who would have a different perception of you than the ones given above?

7. Are others' perceptions important to you? Why – explain?

D. Reading Habits

1. Tell me about yourself as a reader. (Are you a good reader? Not so good reader?) How do you know? *
2. Do you have any reading experiences that stand out for you? Such as the first book you could not put down or when you discovered that you liked or disliked reading?
3. What does a good reader do? * How do you know this? Do you have any of these traits? Which ones?
4. If you do not understand a word or passage in a reading what do you do?
5. Do you like to read? What kinds of materials? *
6. When do you read? *
7. Do you ever read when you are not in school? Give me an example of something you have read when you are not in school. *
8. How would your teachers describe your reading? *
9. How would your parents describe you as a reader? How would your classmates describe you as a reader? **
10. Is it important for you to have your teacher, parents and classmates see you as this type of reader? Why?
11. How often to you participate in classroom discussions on reading? Why do you or do you not participate?

12. What reading activities, assigned in class or self-created outside of the classroom, do you enjoy doing? Why?
13. How do you think your reading level is as compared to your parents'? Your classmates'? **
14. Is it important to be a good reader? Why? For entertainment sake or for learning or both – explain.
15. Is reading connected to your future? Explain how?

E. The Relationship Between Reading Choices and Identity:

1. Who are the best readers in your class? How do you know? *
2. Tell me about the book you are currently reading in class or the last book you read in class.
3. How did you like the book? *
4. Tell me about the books you have read in school that you liked.
5. Why did you like them?
6. Who is/was the main character in the book you are currently reading in class or read last? **
7. Tell me what this character was like.
8. Was this character similar to you? **
9. In which ways was the character different than you?
10. Tell me about the books you have read in school that you did not like.
11. Why did you not like them?

12. Do you think that it is important to like a book that you read? Do you think that it is important to like or find similarities with the main characters in the books that you read?
13. Are you reading a book outside of the classroom curriculum?
14. Tell me about the main character in this book that you chose on your own.
15. Why did you choose this book to read?
16. Was reading this book important to you? If so, why?
17. Have you read many books with characters from different backgrounds, religions or ethnicity? If so, tell me about these books? What did you like or dislike about them?
18. Is reading overall important to you and why?
19. Circle five words that best describe you. * If a descriptive word you are looking for is not included please add and circle it.
    a. Fun, loving, energetic, happy, sad, interesting, boring, enthusiastic, smart, good listener, kind, helpful, rambunctious, humorous, thoughtful, shy, outgoing, athletic, curious, talkative, friendly or other ____________.

20. What five words would your parents use to describe you? Why?*
21. What five words would a friend who knows you best use to describe you? Why? Who is this friend?*
22. What five words would your English teacher use to describe you? Why? **

23. Circle the four things you like to do most. Rank those four.* If an activity you like to do is missing please add and rank it accordingly.
    a. Reading, writing, playing games (inside or outside), watching TV, working or playing on the computer, playing sports, building things, doing experiments, drawing, shopping, seeing new things, talking to friends, making music, listening to music or other __________________.

24. Circle the 3 most important things in your future life. * If an important aspect is missing please add and circle it.
    a. Making a lot of money, being happy, finding something I am good at, becoming famous, making the world a better place, learning, having fun, seeing new places, meeting people, creating new things (music, writing, sewing…), having a family or other_________________.