COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE READING DEVELOPMENT DURING AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF THREE ADOLESCENT READERS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University Graduate School of Education, Health and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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December 2010
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The purpose of this study was to explore how three struggling, sixth grade readers experienced an after-school program designed to increase their affective and cognitive reading performance. Research in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, reading strategy development, discussion of text, time spent reading, engagement, and reader self-perception provided a foundation for the study. This study utilized a multiple case study design. Qualitative data was analyzed and described with rich description regarding what the students did (actions), what the student said (words), and their interactions with one another as they participated in the after-school program.

During an eight-week period, students attended the after-school program where they participated in text and vocabulary discussions, read engaging literature, and learned reading strategies. Participant reader self-perception and engagement were also addressed. Data consisted of individual interviews, focus group interviews, transcripts of discussion sessions, researcher field notes, work samples, and pre-reading and post-reading inventory assessment data. Data analysis during the reading and rereading of data resulted in emerging themes for the individual participants. Through a cross case analysis, similarities and differences among the cases evolved.
Results indicated that this group of struggling readers (a) needed a great deal of direct modeling, instruction, and practice to perform as members of a discussion group; (b) thrived as readers in a small group intimate setting that encouraged their voice in discussion of text; (c) did not possess knowledge or use of reading strategies at the onset of the study; (d) could utilize reading strategies under the support of the teacher but had difficulty applying them in independent reading during this time period; (e) increased their engagement with reading when they had choice in text selection; (f) had reading performance that was impeded by their lack of preparation at the onset of the study; (g) advanced their understanding of both text and vocabulary through discussion to make meaning experiences; (h) utilized the reading strategy of connection to make meaning of text; and (i) were individuals with diverse needs and strengths.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals guided and nurtured this study to fruition. First and foremost, I offer my heartfelt thanks to the four students who allowed me to learn with them and through their experiences as they read, discussed books, and engaged in meaningful literacy accomplishments.

To my dissertation study committee members, Drs. Padak, Tankersly, Sandmann, and Manna—I thank you each for your guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this endeavor. Dr. Padak, thank you for your mentoring, constructive questions, and most of all for your kindness. I also am indebted to you for all you taught me and all you encouraged me to learn and accomplish.

And to my family and friends I deeply appreciate your love, support, and encouragement that sustained me throughout this process. My always-enthusiastic coach and faithful study partner, Dr. Mary Toepfer, I thank you for all the days you called to schedule work sessions and for your gentle nudge to the library. My mentor and dearest of friends, Dr. Joanne Franks, thanks for your encouragement and being the inspiration that led me to follow in your footsteps. To my other best friends Tracy Mackovick, Ruth Murosko, Donna Polak, and Regina Teustch, thanks for always asking “is it done yet?” and for your follow up directive of “just get it done.” My Kent sisters: Dr. Allison Baer, Dr. Terri Duncko, and Brigette McDonnell, my fondest memories of those long Kent nights after a hard day’s work were spent with you, learning, laughing, and supporting one another. I’ll forever hold dear to my heart our days together.
I am ecstatic to be able to share this with those whom I most cherish. For my mother, Barbara Moransky, and my husband, Jamie Miller, whose support, encouragement, and care for my daughters made this possible; I am grateful for your sacrifices that throughout the years have helped make my dreams possible. To my greatest loves and joy, Madelynn and Katelynn, I share this accomplishment with you in hopes that one day you love learning as much as Mommy. You are my finest and most cherished treasures yet. More than any accomplishment or feat, I longed for the day I finally held you both in my arms. And to my grandmother, Elsie Mae Hannum-Durst who wanted this—This is for you, Mae!
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nick is home alone, again. His mother said he must complete all his homework and be in bed by the time she arrives home from working her second job, additional work that she has taken on at night to keep the family afloat since Nick’s dad left.

Nick slouches in the beanbag chair that occupies the corner of his bedroom, which is adorned in dirty clothes, video games, and sports paraphernalia. As he struggles to reread a paragraph from the book, *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg (1967), Nick tries to locate a response for the short answer questions that his teacher assigned. After several attempts to concentrate on what he reads, he abandons the task at hand and begins to sketch action figures from the video game that he plays for hours each night. Nick is not a stranger to failure associated with reading, nor is he a stranger to the cumbersome books his teachers and parent insist that he read at home to improve his reading ability. In fact, Nick is reading two levels below grade level. His reading deficiency creates a great deal of difficulty in content area subjects where required texts may be three or more levels above his independent reading level.

Consequently, Nick views himself as a poor reader and believes that he will always be a poor reader. Unfortunately, Nick is beginning to care less and less about reading, especially reading for enjoyment, as he progresses through the grades. For him, reading is anything but fun. The books that his teachers and parent say he should be reading have little relevance to his interests or to his life for that matter. Nick recalls that his teacher briefly spoke of reading for pleasure, but Nick finds little pleasure in the
books that they say he should read or even the ones he finds in his school library during their weekly book check out time. There are so many other things he could be doing like playing basketball with the neighborhood boys or watching his favorite DVD. He’s bored, he’s frustrated, and he wishes that he were playing the video game that he’s using as a footrest. Many students like Nick find ways to avoid reading at all costs.

Regrettably, Nick’s teacher has little time to address the need to build her students’ engagement with reading due to the many content standards she must teach to prepare her students for the state mandated reading achievement test. This is an unfortunate occurrence because students like Nick, due to their unpleasant struggles with reading, need extra attention in developing their engagement with reading. Nick would also benefit from guided reading time that includes explicit modeling of reading strategy instruction. However, components of a balanced literacy curriculum such as reciprocal instruction and fostering engagement with literature often become another casualty of accountability at his school as teachers and administer race to prepare students for state-mandated standardized testing.

Furthermore, Nick is often removed from his regular, middle school reading class for a remedial reading program. Nick has participated in a daily, 42-minute pullout, Title One Reading Program since first grade. However, the worksheets and drill remedial exercises that the program provides have done little to improve Nick’s reading ability, and he misses reading activities like guided reading, literature circles, and sustained silent reading time in his regular classroom (Campbell & Howard, 1993; Kos, 1991; Routman, 2003). However, it really doesn’t bother Nick that he misses sustained silent reading
time. Nick doesn’t like reading and is embarrassed that he can’t comprehend most of the grade level novels like *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* that are available in his teacher’s classroom library.

Each year in their school career, struggling adolescent readers, like my former student Nick, fall further behind their peers, and their reading problems grow in intensity as they participate in this phase of schooling (Ivey, 1999; Stanovich, 1986). For many of these students, typical middle school reading intervention programs are not enough to remediate their reading struggles and encourage reading engagement (Ivey, 2008). Struggling adolescent readers require additional well-designed reading instruction and practice beyond their typical reading and remedial programs if they are ever going to succeed to the level of their non-struggling peers. They need intense intervention to improve their reading abilities and engagement with reading before it is too late (Allington, 1983). Unfortunately for Nick, the boy in the aforementioned vignette, the middle school he attends implemented a literacy-based after-school program at the end of Nick’s 8th grade year. Nick may have missed his last chance to become a lifelong reader.

**Statement of the Problem**

Several factors explain why most traditional middle school reading programs and remedial reading programs do not typically prove to be successful in helping struggling adolescent readers improve their reading ability. One reason is that reading instruction at the middle school level does not receive as much attention at the local, state, or national level that elementary reading instruction receives. Unrau (as cited in Vacca, 1998) stated, “While not questioning the paramount importance of early literacy development, we hear
much less about a parallel crisis in adolescent literacy development—the magnitude of which is yet to be fully measured, let alone confronted and addressed” (p. 604).

Alvermann (2002) brought attention to adolescent literacy when stating “adolescents and their specialized needs for literacy instruction at the middle and high school level often go unnoticed by policy makers and the general public” (p. 189). Alvermann called for effective classroom instruction to be well developed for adolescent readers.

Despite the number of literacy needs in adolescent lives, educational policies, school curriculum, and public attention have neglected adolescent literacy. Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik (1999) found that:

Adolescents are being short changed. No one is giving adolescent literacy much press. It is certainly not a hot topic in educational press or a priority in schools. The literacy needs of the adolescent reader are far different from those of primary grade children. Many people do not recognize reading development as a continuum. (p. 97)

Furthermore, Vacca (1998) challenged people not to ignore the importance of adolescent literacy. Vacca warned, “beware of putting all our eggs in the basket of improved literacy in early childhood” (p. 609).

Fortunately, events are beginning to change in the world of adolescent literacy. *Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement* (Moore et al., 1999) highlighted the vast literacy needs required of adolescents if they are to compete in the 21st century.

Furthermore, programs such as the *Striving Reader’s Program* (U. S. Department of Education, 2005), *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004), and other policy-initiated
Statements have demonstrated a positive federal interest in adolescent literacy. *Striving Readers* creates grant monies to develop and implement research-based reading interventions for middle- or high-school students who are reading significantly below grade level. *Reading Next*, an expansion of *The Reading First Program*, provides grant monies for research and programs designed to help adolescents acquire the reading comprehension skills that can help them progress as lifelong readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Careful consideration of intervention programs is necessary to achieve the hoped for potential that these initiatives offer.

Another factor that hinders adolescent reading development is the scheduling constraints in the middle school environment (Ivey & Fischer, 2006). Many students do not have time in their days to participate in both their regular reading class and also receive the high quality intervention that they need to grow as readers (Ivey, 2008). In order to progress, struggling adolescent readers need to spend time with their non-struggling peers in a balanced literacy reading workshop as well as to have time built in their day to participate in intensive reading remediation with an intervention specialist. Furthermore, many middle school schedules do not allow time for the engaged, independent reading at a student’s independent reading level that is so important for moving struggling readers to proficiency (Guthrie, 2004).

In addition, problems appear with the lack of differentiated curriculum and instruction found in general middle school reading classes and remedial reading programs (Ivey, 2008). Most students in middle schools are beyond the emergent developmental stages of reading such as phonetic acquisition, decoding, and developing fluent reading.
Thus, middle school reading programs concentrate on improving adolescents’ vocabulary and expanding students’ comprehension. Many middle school reading programs address areas such as higher order thinking abilities, theme awareness, life application, authors’ styles, literary devices, and reading informational text (Arthur, 1999). For the student who struggles with reading, these higher order skills and the accelerated instructional pace of many classrooms are problematic. Students who do not progress adequately in early reading tasks and lack basic skills may never reach the success levels of their reading proficient peers (Allington, 1994; Ivey, 2008). Many adolescents who struggle with their literacy development have experienced difficulty with literacy since the beginning of their schooling because they have never experienced curriculum and instruction that was individualized to build on their strengths and remediate their weaknesses (Ivey, 2008; Kos, 1991; Short, 1999). Struggling adolescent readers need both intensive intervention and time to participate in authentic literacy experiences (Allington, 1983, Allington & Cunningham, 2002; Almasi, 1996; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Struggling readers also need time to process and make meaning of what they have read through peer-led discussions (Routman, 2003).

In addition, the Ohio English Language Arts Standards do not address the needs of struggling adolescent readers or provide middle school teachers with suggestions to improve the struggling adolescent reader’s weaknesses in the reading. The vast number of academic standards that need to be covered each year in school allows little time in the school day for the intense intervention that older struggling readers require (Ivey, 2008). The academic standards and achievement tests demand that all students work at the same
pace and on a standard level, which proves difficult if not impossible for the struggling reader who is reading two or more levels below grade level. For example, phonemic acquisition stops at the third grade level in the Ohio academic standards; however, there are many struggling adolescent readers who may benefit from phonics instruction (Allen-DeBoer, Malmgren, & Glass, 2006).

The educational system has added to the problem of reading failure in the adolescent population (Allington, 1994). Research with regard to remedial reading programs demonstrates that many programs for adolescent learners are unproductive (Allington, 1994; Ivey, 2008; Kos, 1991). However, schools continue to facilitate the same type of curriculum and instruction for struggling adolescent readers (Kos, 1991). The problem in developing curriculum and instruction for struggling adolescent readers is that in order for changes in the education of adolescents to occur successfully and benefit students, educators and administrators need to understand the literacy needs of adolescent learners and best practices in adolescent literacy for all learners.

Many middle school reading intervention programs are poorly designed, minimal, and focus on remediation of students’ reading problems with worksheets (Allington, 1994). The programs focus on instructions and directions for completing the worksheets rather than the direct modeling and practice of reading strategies. Hence, students who are placed in remedial reading programs continue to struggle and experience failure throughout their middle and high school years (Kos, 1991). Struggling readers are often left in the remedial programs for years and miss their regular reading class where the chance to interact with non-struggling readers and quality literature may inspire their
reading growth and help them to create meaning (Allington, 1994). Students miss the opportunity to participate in guided reading experiences, vocabulary instruction, and time to discuss books with their reading proficient peers.

Struggling adolescents may also require intensive reading intervention programs which include reading strategy instruction, time for independent reading of high interest reading materials that are at the child’s independent reading levels, word attack modeling and practice, vocabulary development, and time to discuss literature with others in order to make meaning (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). The problem explored in this study examines how the participation in an intense literacy-based after-school program influences the reading development of three struggling adolescent readers.

This study examines the influence of an after-school literacy-based program in two areas: affective reading development and cognitive reading development. For the purpose of this study, the areas of affective reading development are defined as engagement with reading and perception of oneself as a reader. The study examines cognitive reading development in the following areas: vocabulary development, reading strategy instruction, discussion to create meaning, and time spent reading. Furthermore, three additional areas are addressed in the review of literature, which support the background and rationale for the study: adolescent reading failure, remedial programs as intervention tools, and characteristics of struggling adolescents and their development as readers. Research in the areas of critical theory, sociocultural, and constructivist theories are integrated in the sections of the literature review to provide a theoretical background for the study.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine what happens when struggling adolescent readers participate in an after-school literacy-based program for approximately eight hours each week during an eight and one-half week period. The focus of the study was the experiences and interactions of three 6th grade students, who participated in the after-school program for at-risk students. These students were socio-economically and academically disadvantaged, struggling, adolescent readers who participated in the program with 23 other struggling, adolescent readers from grades five through eight. This study, through holistic and naturalistic description (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), demonstrates how the children’s reading cognition developed as they participated in the after-school literacy-based program. In addition, the students’ impressions of themselves as readers were examined; the study sought to explore how their perceptions of themselves as readers and their engagement with reading changed and developed as they participated in the program. The rich, detailed description was accomplished by developing case studies (Stake, 1995) of the three 6th grade students’ experiences and interactions in the program during the months of April, May, and June in the first year in which their school implemented the after-school program.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. What happens to struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive reading development during their participation in an after school program?
2. What happens to struggling adolescent readers’ affective reading development during their participation in an after school program?

Definitions of Terms

*Adolescent:* A student who is between the ages of 10 and 14, attending middle school in grades five, six, seven, or eight.

*Affective Reading Development:* The individual’s feelings about reading (engagement) and their feelings about themselves as a reader (reader self-perception).

*After School Literacy-Based Program:* An after-school program designed to improve struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive and affective reading development.

*Case Study:* “A detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject . . . or a particular event” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 258).

*Cognitive Reading Abilities:* “Dependent readers might lack the cognitive abilities to read independently. Without this cognitive confidence, they might struggle with comprehension, vocabulary, word recognition, fluency, and automaticity” (Beers, 2003, p. 17). For the purposes of this study, cognitive reading abilities are defined as the participant’s abilities to comprehend text, acquire vocabulary, read independently, and use language as a means to demonstrate comprehension of text and vocabulary.

*Frustration Reading Level:* “The level at which the student is unable to pronounce many of the words and/or is to comprehend the material satisfactorily” (Johns, 2008, p. 7).

*Independent Reading Level:* “The level at which the student reads fluently with excellent comprehension” (Johns, 2008, p. 7).
Instructional Reading Level: “The level at which the student can make maximum progress” (Johns, 2008, p. 7).

Reading Engagement: Engaged readers have the motivation to succeed in literacy tasks and the desire to read to understand, experience pleasure, and learn. Engaged readers believe in their reading abilities, are mastery oriented, are intrinsically motivated, and demonstrate self-efficacy in reading ventures (Guthrie, 2004). For the purpose of this study engagement is defined as how the student feels about reading.

Reading Strategically: Strategic readers have a plan and purpose when they read. They are aware as they read. Strategic readers use a variety of strategies when reading based on what they are reading and their purpose in reading (Beers, 2003).

Reciprocal Teaching: The teacher models reading strategy aloud. Then the students model the strategy for their peers. The teacher supports the students as they model and discuss strategies until scaffolding is no longer required for execution of the reading strategies (Palinscar & Brown, 1984).

Scaffolding: Teachers provide guidance for students as they attempt to think aloud, modeling their use of reading strategies.

Struggling Readers: Students who often read below their grade level, lack literacy in their lives, avoid text, possess underdeveloped vocabularies, fail to read fluently, have difficulty with word attack, and do not utilize strategies in reading to help them understand and engage with what they are reading (Robb, 2000).
Assumptions

I assumed that participation in an after-school program would influence the struggling adolescents’ reading development in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary development, time spent reading, and reading strategy usage. I further assumed that participation in a literacy-based program would influence interactions with other students and adults that, in turn, would help students engage in meaning construction and the learning of reading. In addition, I assumed that participation in an after-school program would positively influence participants’ attitudes toward reading achievement in the areas of reading engagement and perception of oneself as a reader. I assumed that children’s behavior in the after-school program would reflect their abilities and attitudes as readers. Students in the after-school, literacy-based program would provide honest responses. I also assumed that the students would act as willing participants in the activities and engage in interaction with one another to make meaning of text.

Limitations

This study, designed as a case study, demonstrated that there were attained benefits for the three students who participated in the after-school literacy program; however the findings should not be generalized to any other setting. I attempted to design the study to make the work applicable to other situations by providing in depth and rich description (Stakes, 1995). Although the participants in my case study made definite gains in their reading development and positive attitude toward reading, during the instructional intervention that took place in the after-school program, it is impossible
to determine if these improvements are transferable to other settings outside the research setting without a longitudinal study being conducted (Alvermann, 2002).

The age of the participants may have influenced their ability to truthfully and precisely detail their experiences. In order to overcome this limitation, multiple sources of data were collected. Triangulation of data sources and a cross case analysis were applied to add credibility to the study’s results (Merriam, 1998). Additionally another limitation is that other age groups were not studied to determine if similar findings emerged. The study was conducted only with a small population of sixth grade students, and the students may have offered responses that they felt pleased me as I had been one participant’s fifth grade reading teacher and was two participants’ sixth grade social studies teacher at the time of the study. I also served as director of the after-school program as well as handled all discipline issues that arose during the program, so the students may have viewed me as a principal or authoritarian-type figure (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). I focused on the students who I believed would help me learn the most about struggling readers (Stake, 1998). I minimized these limitations by spending a significant amount of time in the setting, encouraging the students to feel comfortable in our small group discussion and allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings (Guba & Lincoln, 1983). As time progressed in the study, I tried to talk less and support student dialogue to a greater extent.

**Significance**

This study contributes to the research base in the field of adolescent literacy research. This qualitative study was designed to explore an after-school program, which
was designed to facilitate the cognitive and affective reading development of struggling adolescent readers. The focus of this study was the experiences and interactions of three students in the after-school intervention program. The after-school program encouraged the learning of reading through vocabulary development, reading strategy utilization, time spent reading, and discussion to make meaning. The program attempted to improve the students’ attitudes toward reading by addressing issues related to reader self-perception and reading engagement. The study also examined the influence of extended reading time for the struggling adolescent reader and contributes to the research field in the area of extra time reading as a remedial tool.

A significant amount of research has been conducted with regard to early literacy and early reading intervention programs that have been successful with young students (Clay, 1993). Many of these early reading intervention strategies have been used in remedial programs with adolescent learners. However, the needs of the struggling adolescent reader differ from those of emergent readers (Moore et al., 1999). Furthermore, if the early intervention was not effective when the struggling adolescent reader was a young child, schools should not continue the same practices. Until recently research on successful reading instruction for the struggling adolescent reader population has been nominal. Thus, this study contributes to the research with regard to remediation designed specifically for the struggling adolescent reader population outside the school day.

The students who participated in the study benefited from their participation in small group tutoring and reading development sessions. I provided the students in the
study with reading strategy instruction, vocabulary development exercises, and comprehension building experiences. The students had extended reading instruction and time to read for pleasure. They read high-interest, adolescent novels that they selected. The novels were on the individual’s independent reading level in order to increase engagement with reading and build the students’ perceptions of themselves as good readers. Students had the opportunity to interact with other students and me in order to create meaning in reading and increase their enjoyment with reading. Many adolescents do not read anything outside of the school environment unless teachers assign it, and even then many adolescents rush through independent reading homework to get to activities that they view as more enjoyable. However, students who read frequently have better reading skills and achieve higher grades (Gardiner, 2001). Several measures were taken to help the adolescents develop skill and interest in reading and to increase their view of themselves as good readers.

Teachers and administrators may wish to analyze the procedures found in this study, implementing them in their remedial reading programs. The rich description will benefit those educators and administrators who attempt to provide additional remedial support beyond the school day for struggling adolescent readers. This study also presents information regarding remedial practices, which educators or curriculum developers may wish to adapt for use in their school day remedial programs. Additionally, the general reading research community may benefit from this project. Reading researchers and university professors may find information in this study to share with their graduate and
undergraduate education students so that when they become practicing educators, they can nurture at risk learners and help them grow as readers.

Finally, this study is relevant because it gives voice to struggling readers; their feelings about reading and themselves as readers, their experiences and their struggle to survive in instructional environments that are not always conducive to the nurturance of their potential. By listening closely and carefully to their actions and to their voices, an often, absent voice in the classroom and in the literature, we can finally design curriculum and instruction that helps them do more than survive academically.

Summary

Obstacles to reading growth in the struggling adolescent reader population exist both within the school environment and within the individuals themselves. Reading growth in struggling adolescent readers cannot be achieved until these problems are lessened or eliminated altogether. Struggling adolescent readers continue to suffer recurrent school failure due to a lack of federal, state, and local attention to their needs. Today, due to the ever-expanding literacy demands that society places on the individual, it is imperative that appropriate programs are designed to help these students remediate their reading difficulties.

This study examined the influence of an after-school program on adolescent reading development. I explored the experiences and interactions of three 6th grade, struggling adolescent readers in order to analyze the after-school literacy-based program’s effectiveness. The goal of the study was to explore what happened in the
adolescents’ cognitive development and affective reading development as each student participated in the after-school program.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

The focus of this case study was the interactions and experiences of three struggling adolescent readers who participated in an after-school program designed to facilitate the learning of reading in the adolescent struggling reader population. I provided a foundation for the study by examining literature relevant to the research questions. Research related to adolescent learners, the reading failure of adolescents in schools, and intervention programs were explored to build context for the study. This is followed by an investigation of two areas pertaining to the individual’s affective reading development: engagement with reading and perception of one’s self as a reader. Finally, areas that impact cognitive reading development were examined: vocabulary development, reading strategy instruction, discussion to create meaning, and time spent reading.

Research That Provides a Foundation for the Study

Adolescent Readers

Characteristics of adolescent readers. Early (1984) introduced a summary of adolescent reading development in which she outlined three characteristics of middle school readers. First, Early suggested that middle school readers can read accurately and fluently in grade level texts. Secondly, she felt that middle school readers master low-level comprehension practices in text that includes concrete experiences, but they experience difficulty dealing with abstract concepts. Early also found that middle school
readers do not spend a great deal of time reading. However, the reading needs of the adolescents, especially those who struggle with reading, are diverse, and many adolescents may not fit neatly into the categories defined by Early. Alvermann (2002) defined struggling readers as those with “clinically diagnosed reading disabilities as well as those who are second language learners, at-risk, unmotivated, disenchanted, or generally unsuccessful in school literacy tasks” (p. 1).

The Rand Institute of Education and Training (2005) found that certain groups fall behind their peers in reading achievement. Fifty percent of children from at-risk backgrounds (low parental education level or income level) score below the basic level of reading achievement at the 8th and 12th grade level. In the Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement (1999), Moore et al. wrote that, “Adolescents deserve homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed” (p. 9).

Adolescents who struggle with literacy development have often experienced difficulty with literacy since the beginning of their schooling (Durkin, 1966). Joyce, Showers, Scanlon, and Schnaubelt (1998) discovered that 30% of young adolescents leave elementary school without basic reading skills. Durkin (1966) contended that by sixth grade, children who struggled to read in grade one are behind their peers in performance. As a result of their constant struggle with reading, many adolescent readers often have a negative attitude toward reading and schooling. Many of these adolescents have discovered complex strategies to avoid reading aloud in class, by acting out or
withdrawing (Vogt, 1997). The struggling adolescent reader may exhibit coping behaviors such as disrupting class to defer attention from their struggles with reading.

August, Flavell, and Clift (1984) found that middle school students who struggle in reading do not use effective strategies. Struggling adolescent readers must realize that reading is worth their effort in order to desire to improve their reading ability (Moniuszko, 1992; National Reading Panel Report, 2000). Furthermore a reader’s feelings about oneself and one’s ability to succeed at reading influences one’s reading success (Covington, 1992; Ruddell & Unrau, 1994).

Guthrie (2004) believed that although struggling adolescent readers between grades three through eight may need improvement influency and word recognition, their main struggles are in comprehension. Guthrie defined these comprehension difficulties as inability to comprehend the gist, inability to connect to what they are reading about, and inability to examine text for its structural elements. Both the Adolescent Literacy Position Statement (Moore et al., 1999) and Reading Next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) include the importance of explicit comprehension instruction as a component of a balanced literacy program.

**Case studies of struggling adolescent readers.** Morris, Ervin, and Conrad (1996) conducted an investigation of a sixth-grade struggling reader, whom they felt possessed characteristics of struggling readers in general. They found that poor comprehension abilities affected the student’s reading development. After a two-year tutoring program where the student was taught at the appropriate instruction level and received reading strategy instruction, the student demonstrated significant gains in his
comprehension abilities. Morris and his fellow researchers concluded that reading development for struggling readers could improve with appropriate instruction from well-trained practitioners.

Kos (1991), in a case study of four middle school struggling readers, found similar results to Morris and his colleagues. Kos found that the students in the study did not know how to apply the strategies that they were taught. She also found a connection between the progress a struggling reader attains and the type of instruction that he or she receives.

Adolescent Reading Failure

Factors pertaining to schools that cause adolescent reading failure. Research suggests several factors related to schooling that may prevent struggling adolescent readers from advancing in their growth as readers. In reviewing the literature, variables arose that influence reading failure in the struggling adolescent reader population as follows: the design of curriculum, instructional practices, and placement of struggling readers (Allington, 1994; Alm, 1981; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Ivey, 2008; Kos, 1991). Issues pertaining to curriculum and instruction are discussed in this section of this dissertation. Placement of struggling adolescent readers is discussed in the section entitled, “Intervention Programs.”

Demands of middle school reading curriculum. At the middle school level, the curricular reading demands placed on students increase drastically from the elementary school level. Moore et al. (1999) suggested the many reading demands that adolescents will encounter in the middle school environment:
Upper grade youth increase their reading fluency and adjust their reading speed according to their ease with reading. They discern the characteristics of different types of fiction and nonfiction materials. They refine their tastes in reading and their response to literature. Middle school learners build on the literacy strategies they learned in the early grades to make sense of abstract, complex subjects far removed from their personal experiences. (p. 101)

Pearson and Fielding (1991) contended that at the middle school level, knowledge of literary elements such as conflict, plot, setting, and resolution is important for comprehension development.

The need for an intense reading curriculum is attributed to the vast and complicated literacy demands that individuals will meet in adulthood (Allington, 1994). The Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association addressed the demands that adolescent readers will face as follows:

Adolescents entering the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced level of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read will even be crucial. Continual instruction beyond the early grades is needed. (Moore et al., 1999, p. 99)
The reading related demands stated in aforementioned quote may be advanced beyond the ability level of the struggling adolescent reader (Alm, 1981). Consequently, skills such as abstract reasoning and discerning the characteristics of genre are difficult for the struggling reader who may be concentrating cognitive energy on decoding words in an attempt to gain meaning. For struggling readers who have not mastered basic decoding and word attack skills, these higher-order thinking tasks are difficult (Campbell & Howard, 1993). The struggling adolescent reader will have to comprehend a vast array of genre, and ability to comprehend will correlate with survival in content area subjects (Chall & Conrad, 1991; Vacca & Vacca, 2004). Many times the developmental needs of the learner and the fact that learners progress at different rates are overlooked in the curricular and instructional design of reading programs (Lesley, 2001). Ivey and Broaddus (2001) suggested four common practices that are incongruent with what adolescent readers need. They are as follows: one-size-fits-all curriculum, minimal materials for instruction, a lack of student ownership, and ineffective implementation of instructional time.

Contrary to these demands placed on adolescents, results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; National Institute for Literacy, 2004) showed that 75% of eighth grade students in the United States performed at or above the basic level of reading, but only few had progressed past basic to an advanced level of reading. Fewer than 4% of the middle school students that NAEP assessed performed at the advanced level. Despite the pervasiveness of reading problems in adolescents, many middle schools do not make reading a priority in their schedules (Irvin, 1998).
**Instruction.** Sadly, many adolescents do not improve as readers because they do not know how to improve their reading abilities. Laura Robb (2000) held:

Unfortunately, too many older students do not receive the support they need to help them grow from fluent decoders into strategic readers—readers who know how to activate prior knowledge before, during, and after reading; decide what’s important in the text; synthesize information; draw inferences during and after reading; ask questions; and self monitor and repair faulty comprehension. (p. 116)

Yet, numerous methods exist to aid students in building their comprehension skills (Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pearson & Camperell, 1994; Shearer, Vogt, & Ruddell, 2001). Instruction can greatly influence the degree to which struggling readers progress (Allington, 1994; Ivey, 2008). However, Moore et al. (1999) found that the limited number of reading education classes in which pre-service middle school teachers participate does not adequately prepare them to meet the instructional needs of adolescent learners. Moore et al. wrote:

Research on expert teachers has produced an image of decision makers effectively orchestrating classroom life. Expert teachers help students get to the next level of strategy development by addressing meaningful topics, making visible certain strategies, then gradually releasing responsibility for the strategies to the learners. Adolescents deserve such instruction in all their classes. (p. 104)

Comprehension problems are further exacerbated when the teacher relies on the grade-level textbook as the means for curriculum and instruction and the struggling
reader is reading below grade level. Ben-Peretz (1990) found that a vast number of
teachers rely heavily on textbooks to determine what they teach. With reading demands
that increase drastically at the middle school level and one-size-fits-all reading textbook
that drives the curriculum, struggling readers are destined to gain very little meaning
from what they read. Consequently, teachers treat high and low reading achievers
differently. Higher functioning readers receive more instructional time and greater
opportunity to engage in higher levels of thinking and strategic learning (Stanovich,
1986). It is evident by the demands placed on adolescent readers, mentioned previously
in this section, that adolescents must know and utilize reading strategies in order to
succeed in their middle school reading endeavors. Struggling readers require more in-
depth teacher modeling and explanation of reading tasks and strategies (Biancarosa &
Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999).

Durkin (1979) exposed the lack of reading comprehension instruction in the
middle grades. Her work claimed there was little that was instructive about teachers’
directives. Durkin wrote that teachers’ instructions involved directing students in
completing workbook pages, answering questions, and administering tests. She found
that teachers offer little advice to students on how to comprehend text when reading.
Unfortunately, more recent research confirms Durkin’s findings that teachers spend little
instructional time teaching and modeling strategies, instead focusing on asking students
about what they have read and giving directions (Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley, 1981;
Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998). The aforesaid studies
demonstrate that teachers may offer little useful instruction to help struggling readers overcome their reading problems.

**Intervention Programs**

**Remedial reading programs.** Both negative and positive practices occur in the intervention programs designed for the struggling adolescent reader. Traditional pullout programs of literacy intervention deny struggling readers access to a rich core curriculum (Campbell & Howard, 1993). Learning rules for phonics, spelling, and grammar is emphasized rather than a balanced literacy approach individualized to meet the needs of the students (Allington, 1998; Alm, 1981). Thus, the positive effects of these pullout programs are negligible (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Struggling readers need a literacy program that is “comprehensive and coordinated” and they need “extended time for literacy” (Biancarosa & Snow, as cited in Hinchman & Sheridan-Thomas, 2008, p. 315).

The design of most remedial reading programs is based on the “banking concept” of education wherein the teacher “deposits” knowledge into the child’s mind (Freire, 2004). In contrast, constructivist thinkers believe that children are not empty vessels that rely on knowledge passed from one person to another person to make meaning, but are engaged in creating knowledge (Richardson & Placier, 2001). However, students in remedial reading programs are often not given the opportunity to interact with their peers to make meaning, but are expected to listen passively to the teacher’s directions and complete worksheets (Goodlad, 1984). Most remedial reading programs fail to consider the individual’s need to construct meaning through social interaction (Lesley, 2001).
majority of individuals who participate in remedial reading programs resent being in the remedial reading program even if they advance as readers (Lesley, 2001).

**Research studies regarding the reading education of struggling adolescent readers.** Kos (1991) studied how four students with reading disabilities developed as readers. She established many factors regarding the students’ remedial programs that hindered their progress. Kos suggested that the following four factors contributed to varying degrees in preventing the four students from experiencing reading growth as follows: the students did not effectively use reading strategies, students experienced poor self-perception regarding their reading development, students experienced high degrees of stress with regard to reading, and students’ past education contributed to their reading failure. The four students in the Kos study were between the ages of 13 and 15 and all were reading below a third grade level, which placed them below the level of functional literacy. She found that the students had negative feelings about their reading intervention programs and claimed that they did not understand what they were being taught.

All four of the students in Kos’ study (1991) were identified as having reading problems in first grade, and after multi-factored evaluations were placed in either Title I or classes for students with learning disabilities, but they exhibited little progress as readers throughout their school careers. Kos discovered that even though the students’ independent reading level was not increasing, they were placed in a more difficult reading text each year of their schooling, experiencing very little effective instruction. Most of the inadequate instruction that the four students received was based on phonemic
awareness and reading sub skills delivered through whole group instruction. According to the students, individualized instruction geared to their individual reading problems did not occur. Eisner (2002) felt that scripted, mandated programs in education do not consider individualization. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) stated, “Two critical responsibilities for teachers are to match instruction to individual student development and to provide contexts in which students can become engaged in reading” (p. 69). In his study of exemplary elementary school teachers, Allington (2002) stated that successful teachers “notice that motivation for reading was dramatically influenced by reading success. They acted on these observations by creating multilevel, multi-sourced curricula that met the needs of diverse range of students in their classrooms” (p. 743).

Lesley (2001) studied college students who were placed in a remedial reading course as a requirement for their college admittance. Lesley found several categories with regard to reasons why students who had been career struggling readers felt marginalized and did not have favorable opinions of the remedial reading, public school programs in which they had participated. The college students offered Lesley reasons as to why they felt marginalized in the public schools that they attended. The students cited the following reasons: “experiencing limited assessment of reading skills, experiencing labeling and tracking, experiencing developmentally inappropriate literacy practices, experiencing cultural disentrancement, experiencing the banking concept of education and experiencing reading as a teacher-centered phenomenon instead of a student centered, transactional phenomenon” (p. 67). Lesley recommended that remedial
programs be designed on the following principles so that struggling readers are not marginalized:

Change narratives from teacher narratives to student narratives, move from a knowledge telling stance to a knowledge transforming stance, change literacy labels from fixed, deficient models to process-oriented models, approach literacy in a concentric, thematic fashion as opposed to a linear fashion, and approach reading in personally-relevant ways in order to develop student purposes for reading. (p. 75)

**Model reading remedial programs.** Short-term intensive reading programs (12-16 weeks) for younger children have shown progress. The goal of these programs is to quickly accelerate student achievement and return the children to their regular classrooms (Pilulski, 1994; Taylor, Short, Frye, & Shearer, 1992). However, the needs of the struggling adolescent reader differ greatly from those of the emergent reader. Eisner (2002) wrote, “A program evaluated as effective in one setting is not guaranteed to be effective in other settings” (p. 175). He also contended that curriculum must be appraised for the population for which it is intended.

Well-designed reading intervention programs provide rich environments that stimulate struggling adolescent readers’ growth (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Shearer et al., 2001). Extended day programs provide the time that struggling readers need to catch up to proficient readers as they spend time in literacy-based activities (Moore, 2008). Also successful in remediation of struggling adolescent readers’ reading deficiencies are school-based programs which extend the time that struggling adolescents spend in
reading-based activities during the school day (Guthrie, 2003; Shearer et al., 2001).
Tutoring and small group instruction holds more benefits than large groups for remediation of reading problems (Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

Exemplary remedial reading programs designed for struggling adolescent readers. Research studies have discovered aspects of positive practices in program design for the remediation of reading problems in the struggling adolescent population. Shearer et al. (2001) examined the effects of a reading intervention program on 17 middle-school aged, struggling readers who scored two years below grade level on subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Test. The researchers studied the effects of a yearlong intervention program that incorporated strategy instruction, student leadership, and a reciprocal teaching model. The students in the study received 43 minutes of daily reading intervention. The students also read for 20 minutes on a daily basis outside of class. Students engaged in reciprocal teaching strategies and shared their personal connections to the text and their reactions to ideas in the text. Students served as group leaders, modeling strategies, and facilitating reciprocal instruction as other students practiced strategy usage and vocabulary word study. Students recorded their summaries, questions, clarifications, predictions, and personal reactions as they read and used these notes during the discussion. Students also reflected on their progress and set goals in their journal entries, and participated in peer and teacher conferences.

Data analysis demonstrated that the study intervention resulted in average gains of four reading grade levels for study participants. Follow up studies one year later indicated that the gains were lasting. All 17 low achieving students in the study were
motivated and interested to complete their 20-minute at-home reading obligations, return their signed logs, and engage in discussions of their readings. Students in the study developed skills at peer coaching, metacognition, and scaffolding reading strategies, which demonstrates that teachers should permit students’ partial ownership of their instruction and learning.

Guthrie and Davis (2003) implemented the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) model to stimulate engagement with reading in the struggling reader population. The CORI program is designed around themes, hands-on experiences, self-governed learning, interesting books, discussion to make meaning, and time spent reading. In the program, teachers implemented the aforementioned practices for 90-120 minutes per day during a 12-week period. In CORI, comprehension strategies are explicitly taught. The teachers modeled the strategy, scaffolded the strategies, and facilitated guided practice situations for the student participants. Guthrie contended that the strategy instruction component of the CORI program is based on the premise that students should be prepared to know the strategy, know when to use it, and put forth the initiation to use it. Activating background knowledge, questioning, searching for information, summarizing, graphic organization, and story structuring are taught for a one-week period, and then their use is integrated into curriculum and instruction during the remainder of the program.

Reading Intervention programs, if designed and implemented correctly, provide struggling adolescent readers with the extra time and experiences that they need to build upon their strengths and remediate their struggles in reading. Exemplary programs such
as those offered by Guthrie and Davis (2003), Shearer et al. (2001), and Lesley (2001) offer insight as to the best practices in reading intervention program design and implementation.

**Affective Areas of Reading Development**

**Engagement With Reading**

**Definitions of engagement.** Dewey stated, “The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning” (1938, p. 48). It is this desire to learn and to learn through reading that is central to much of the literature found with regard to reading engagement in the middle schools. According to Guthrie (2004), engaged readers are those who use various strategies to read, are motivated, and read a great deal. Classrooms that strive to match students with reading materials geared to their interests and reading levels will have highly motivated, engaged readers. Guthrie defined reading engagement as encompassing the following areas “motivational disposition, cognitive strategies, conceptual understanding, and social discourse” (p. 2). Furrer and Skinner (2003) viewed engagement from an affective stance that suggests that enthusiasm and enjoyment influence interaction with the text.

**Characteristics of engaged readers.** Guthrie (2004) believed that engaged readers are higher achievers than less engaged readers, and that engaged readers spend 500% more time reading than non-engaged readers. Thus, Guthrie felt that teachers should increase struggling readers’ engaged reading time by 200-500%. However, reading for pleasure receives minimal attention as a component of a remedial middle school reading program (Ivey, 2008). Thus many struggling adolescent readers do not
engage in independent reading at school or at home. Contrastingly, higher achieving students are more likely to have positive attitudes toward reading, read for leisure, and borrow books from their local library at least once a month (Bean, 2002).

**Reasons for lack of reading engagement.** Factors surrounding the definition of alliteracy shed additional light as to why adolescent readers suffer from lack of reading engagement. Alliterates are defined as those adolescents who can read but choose not to read (Beers, 2003). Dormant adolescent alliterates are those students who like to read but feel they are too busy with life and school to do so. Uncommitted adolescent alliterates do not like to read but are open to the possibility of changing their mind if someone would provide them with something appealing to read. Unmotivated adolescent alliterates like Nick, the adolescent in the vignette at the beginning of the study, are hooked on television, video, and computer games. They are unable to visualize what they are reading. They do not like reading and think that they never will. According to Bean (2002), recreational reading among adolescents is declining, which lessens the possibility of cultivating a literate society.

Bintz (1993) explored middle schools students’ lack of interest in reading. He found that although adolescent students do lose interest in reading, they do not lose interest in pleasure reading. Consequently, he found that the students were not non-strategic readers, but that they used different strategies for in-school reading than for out of school reading tasks. When the materials that students read are of interest to them, higher-order reading strategies are applied; however, when the material is not interesting to students, they apply short-cut strategies to complete the task quickly. Therefore, the
instruction and curriculum found in the school environment also influences the decrease in adolescent engagement with reading.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) discovered that it is difficult to find in-school reading that adolescents like. They surveyed 1,700 sixth-grade students. The sixth-grade students were adamant that they wanted captivating material and time to read. However, sadly, they did not define the classroom as a place where they found desirable reading materials.

Often in-school reading materials are teacher selected. In the process of forcing adolescents to read, adults may be discouraging the adolescents from reading all together. Adolescents begin to associate out-of-school reading with teacher assigned in-school reading. Many students feel that teacher assignments are disconnected from their lives (Tatum, 2008). Many teachers use the same outdated reading lists each year that encourage students to form the opinion that reading is boring and not related to their lives (Bean, 2002). Thus, adolescents become disengaged with reading in general. In addition, teachers select literature that correlates with state standards, which may lack the low readability, high interest factors that struggling adolescents require to progress as readers. Bean wrote, “Fostering a lifelong love of reading will not happen if we simply allow high-stakes testing to drive curriculum design” (p. 35).

**Fostering reading engagement in the adolescent population.** Fortunately, many avenues exist for increasing reading engagement in adolescent learners and increasing their desire to read for pleasure. One method for increasing student engagement with reading is when teachers pair adolescent literature with classics to
engage student interest. Classics tend to address adult issues whereas adolescent
literature connects to issues surrounding the middle school students’ lives (Bean, 2002).
Quiet time for reading and discussing books is important for incorporating young adult
literature into the lives of adolescents. Resistant readers can benefit from being read to or
listening to books on tape (Allington, 1994). Teachers and parents can expose
adolescents to engaging text by encouraging them to listen as they read popular
adolescent literature pieces to them. Thus, students’ attitudes for reading for pleasure
will improve. Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) found that when struggling readers are
read to they often apply the strategies to create meaning that many independent readers
use. Frequently, non-strategic readers are strategic listeners, which underscores the
possibility of using listening-while-reading as an instructional strategy.

Allowing choice is imperative to encouraging adolescents to read. Teachers can
also ignite reading engagement by matching readers with high interest reading materials
at their independent reading level (Bean, 2002; Moniuszko, 1992). Moniuszko, a teacher
of middle school, struggling, resistant readers found that when she matched students with
reading selections of interest, they were motivated to read. She utilized interest inventory
results to provide her students with reading materials that coincided with their interests.
Bean (2002) stated, “Recreational reading can help adolescents achieve in school, but
teachers must provide students with books that both address the curriculum and meet
their needs and interests” (p. 34).

Summary. Much of the research literature surrounding adolescent literacy
involves fostering student engagement with reading (Allington, 2001; Bean, 2002;
The lack of engagement with reading in the adolescent population is a deterrent to reading progress. Many avenues exist for building reading engagement in the struggling adolescent population, and researchers such as Allington (1994), Bean (2002), and Guthrie (2004) offer valuable insight for building student engagement with reading.

**Perception of Oneself as a Reader**

**Reader self-perception.** Self-perceptions strongly influence the degree that a student succeeds in his or her learning environment (Henk & Melnick, 1995; Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). Struggling readers often feel that their reading problems cannot be remediated; thus, they feel helplessness regarding their reading ability and themselves as readers. Many have participated in inaccurate models of reading, which further exacerbate their reading struggles (Kos, 1991; Lesley, 2001). Consequently, struggling readers often believe that any difficulties in reading that they experience reflect their own incompetence. Stanovich (1986) found that when students who struggle with reading become adolescents, their problems with reading become more complex causing them to appear to have multiple deficits. Students who struggle to read early in their school careers develop helplessness, stress, and low self-esteem. They may exhibit defensive behaviors that teachers may attribute to laziness or behavioral issues. Therefore many teachers may falsely view the students as having low intelligence (Gentile & McMillian, 1987). Wigfield and Eccles (1994) discovered a decline in young adolescents’ self-esteem as they enter junior high school and a decrease in the value that they placed on school subjects. Of special concern to Wigfield and Eccles were the adolescents’
feelings, which demonstrated a lack of competency related to their academic performance and indicated potential for their school failure.

**Case studies related to reader self-perception.** Kos (1991), in her case study of four struggling readers, found that the students experienced a great deal of stress related to reading. The students felt that school did not meet their needs. One participant in her study experienced extreme anxiety due to his stuttering and disfluent reading. Another participant feared humiliation because of her reading and worried that she would not be able to function in adulthood due to a lack of functional reading skills. One of Kos’ participants exhibited behavior problems due to his self-consciousness related to reading. Many struggling readers suffer from low self-esteem. They have minimal interest in school or extracurricular activities (Vogt, 1997).

**Improving reader self-perception.** Subsequently, part of an appropriate reading program for struggling adolescent readers involves improving the struggling reader’s negative perception of himself or herself as a reader (Henk & Melnick, 1995). It also involves aiding the struggling reader in discovering that recognizing and taking steps to remediate one’s reading problems are characteristics of good readers. Students’ problems should be discussed openly as matters that need resolution (Anderson & Roit, 1993). Greene (2000) suggested that teachers should instill a belief in children that there are always multiple roads available for their travel that they have not explored before; they should participate in these new journeys to grow as learners. Eisner (2002) wrote:
A child does not need to be taught everything. Once a child learns that there is something to be learned in an area, the child not only learns those things but also learns that he or she can learn even more. (p. 243)

In order to imagine the possible realities that exist for struggling readers, their literacy education must move beyond the mundane characteristics of scripted curriculum and instruction. Student choice and voice in active learning are keys to building student engagement and positive reader self-perception (Moniuszko, 1992; Tatum, 2008).

Cognitive Reading Development

Vocabulary Development

**Vocabulary acquisition.** Vocabulary acquisition is a critical component in furthering the cognitive development of struggling adolescent readers (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Struggling readers have a more limited vocabulary than proficient readers (Graves, 2000). Consequently, word meaning awareness and using language correctly has a profound influence on reading development (Graves, 2000). Many struggling adolescent readers cannot comprehend what they are reading because they cannot decode or recognize words. On the other hand, if a good reader pronounces a word that does not make sense in context, the good reader checks to see if the word has been misread (Gough, 1984). The National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000) found that comprehension is a cognitive process that involves complicated skills. NRP contends that vocabulary acquisition and instruction are critical in comprehension development. The NRP believes that students’ vocabulary can improve by reading or listening to others read, pre-teaching of vocabulary prior to independent reading, direct instruction, and opportunity to read the
same text in various contexts. Bromley (2008) also believed that the best method for vocabulary acquisition is direct instruction.

**Discussion and vocabulary acquisition.** On the other hand, Goodman (1994) contended that vocabulary-building exercises do not improve comprehension but that growth in vocabulary and comprehension can be achieved by allowing children to discuss what they are reading. Goodman wrote:

> It is a mistake to think that vocabulary-building exercises can produce improved comprehension. Language is learned in the context of its use. Word meanings are built in relationship to concepts; language facilitates learning, but it is the conceptual development that creates the need for language. Without that, words are empty forms. So vocabulary is built in the course of language use, including reading. (p. 1127)

Research with regard to the influence of social interaction on vocabulary acquisition has found the combination of social interaction and vocabulary study increases student discussion and is more beneficial than students writing the definitions of new words (Bromley, 2008; Stahl & Vancil, 1986). Discussing vocabulary with others increases vocabulary acquisition (Shearer et al., 2001).

**Student selection of words and vocabulary study.** Students who self-select words for vocabulary study have ownership of their learning (Ruddell & Shearer, 2002). Shearer et al. (2001), in their study of an effective intervention program for struggling readers, discovered that struggling readers selecting their own vocabulary words and discussing the words with peers enhanced vocabulary acquisition and helped the
participants improve as readers. These practices encouraged the struggling readers in the study to build on their background knowledge during group discussions, and the students retained word meanings for a longer extent of time. The struggling readers in the Shearer et al. study (2001) reported noticeable transfer of their vocabulary learning to their writing and reading in other settings. The study demonstrates the importance of allowing students ownership of their learning and the importance of metacognition. The National Reading Panel Report (2000) found that the learning of vocabulary is effective when the student is actively engaged in the learning task. Students who are permitted to select their own words for vocabulary study select words of significant difficulty (Costa & Pozzi, 1992; Fisher, Blachowicz, Costa, & Pozzi, 1992).

**Reading as a tool for vocabulary acquisition.** Students reading a variety of text will improve their vocabulary acquisition. The NRP (2000) found that “vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning. Much of a students’ vocabulary will have to be learned in the course of doing things other than explicit vocabulary learning” (p. 4-4). To act as an independent reader, the struggling adolescent reader must be encouraged to search for connections between new words and words that he or she knows (Clay, 1993). The National Reading Panel (2000) subgroup report on comprehension found that “repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important. Students should be given items that will be likely to appear in many contexts” (p. 4-4). The NRP also found that teachers should not rely on a single vocabulary instructional method for vocabulary learning to occur.
**Fluency and vocabulary development.** It is also important that struggling readers develop fluency in word recognition so that they may apply their cognition to comprehending what they are reading (Pinnell et al., 1995). Fluency improves as students build their vocabulary and word recognition (Allington, 2001). The National Assessment of Educational Progress conducted a vast study of the fluency achievement of American students. The study explored the fluency development of a sample of fourth grade children, and researchers discovered that 44% of the students were not fluent in reading grade level texts. They also found a close relationship between reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension (Pinnell et al., 1995).

**Strategies for vocabulary development.** Many instructional ideas are available for supporting adolescent learners as they apply strategies to difficult texts. For example, teachers can introduce the technical vocabulary before a lesson that students will encounter help to reduce comprehension problems, and teach students to preview passages to focus on the meaning of unfamiliar words. Study guide questions and anticipation statements help the struggling reader further develop their understanding of difficult vocabulary words that hinder their understanding of the text (Billmeyer & Barton, 1998).

**Reading Strategy Instruction**

**Reading strategy definitions.** Webster’s Dictionary (Gurlack, 2003) defined strategy as, “an ingenious plan or method” (p. 727). Morrow (2003) explained that the individual who uses his or her fullest potential while reading and possesses knowledge about print is a strategic reader. Vacca and Vacca (2001) as quoted in Vacca (2002)
wrote, “To put the matter simply, strategic readers know how to think with the text” (p. 8). Reading strategies aid students in planning and facilitating their learning when reading. Subsequently, during reading strategy usage, the adolescent functions as the director of his or her reading experiences (Beers, 2003).

Dewey (1938) defined the term transaction as an individual’s learning taking place as result of experience with their environment. Rosenblatt’s (1994) transactional theory of text holds that a reader actively constructs knowledge through interplay with the text. The reader interacts with the text, and the text encourages an interpretation from the reader. Meaning is created in the interaction or transaction, not in the text. Dewey (1938) stated:

An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation. (pp. 43-44)

Teaching struggling adolescent readers how to use reading strategies empowers the student to actively transact with the text, to construct meaning rather than simply relying on the teacher for the transmission of knowledge.

**Reading strategy instruction.** In the last three decades, research has explored strategies that encourage student comprehension. Most of the studies in the 1980s involved the students’ responses to stimuli under the direction of the teacher (Pearson & Fielding, 1991). August et al. (1984) found that middle school students who struggle in reading do not use effective strategies.
During the 1990s, strategy instruction became known as transactional strategy instruction because it focused on the reader’s interaction with text, and reader interpretations when thinking about the text with others (Pressley et al., 1992). Collins (1991) found that fifth and sixth grade students who use transactional strategies produce better comprehension test scores and are more interpretive readers. Anderson and Roit (1993) found similar results to the Collins’ study in a study of middle and high school students. Their study looked at a small group of reading-delayed adolescents ages 12 to 16 and the reading strategy instruction that they received from two groups of pre-service special education teachers. The pre-service teachers were divided into two groups, an experimental and a control group. The experimental teachers received training and support in collaborative reading strategy instruction. The experimental group of pre-service teachers used think-aloud modeling of the reading strategies (Bereiter & Bird, 1985), strategy explanation (Duffy et al., 1987), and reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). The students who received instruction from the teachers in the experimental group made significant reading gains compared to those students in the control group whose teachers had no training. Pressley et al. (1992) stated, “Comprehension instruction is a vital and dynamic area of inquiry in reading, one that promises to provide much more information that could be used to transform reading instruction in schools” (p. 2).

Paris et al. (1983) found that struggling readers can benefit from being read to or from listening to books on tape. The authors found that when struggling readers are read to they often apply the strategies to create meaning that many independent readers use.
Beers (2003) emphasizes that “students can be taught to use a range of comprehension strategies so that these strategies influence how they make meaning from a text” (p. 36).

Instruction in strategic reasoning helps increase the progress of delayed readers (Cooper, 1999). In order to help struggling adolescent readers develop as lifelong, successful readers who read for pleasure, middle school teachers must provide modeling and practice of reading strategies in materials that are at the child’s instructional level. Instructional levels are reading levels one grade level above the level at which the adolescent is reading independently (Johns, 2001). After receiving adequate strategy instruction at their instructional reading level, the adolescent will eventually be challenged to evolve to successful independent reading. Strategies empower students to read with ease and not to have to focus all of their energies on the act of reading, freeing them to gain pleasure from reading (Beers, 2003).

**Types of reading strategies for middle school learners.** Arthur (1999) identified four types or categories of reading strategies: decoding strategies, comprehension strategies, vocabulary-building strategies, and test-taking strategies. Paris et al. (1983) contended that considering the kinds of knowledge is important for teaching students to take steps to become independent users of reading strategies. They connected the triad of declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge to reading strategy acquisition. Declarative knowledge is the student knowing what the strategy is. Procedural knowledge is the student knowing how to utilize the strategy. Conditional knowledge is when the student can independently know when and why to use the strategy.
Beers (2003) defined inferencing, the ability to connect what is in the book to what is in one’s mind in order to make an educated guess, as an important reading strategy for middle school readers. However, students must be taught the thought processes that accompany reading strategy use. Beers suggested that analyzing the process with which students make inferences can aid the teacher in modeling the steps necessary to utilize reading strategies. Beers felt it was also beneficial to have students talk aloud with regard to the thought processes they engage in while using reading strategies.

Robb (2000) recommended the following during strategic reading: make personal connections, adjust or confirm one’s predictions, question, visualize, summarize, reread, infer, and self-monitor for understanding. The National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000) found seven types of text comprehension instruction when they examined 450 studies of text comprehension that improved student reading achievement. They are as follows: “reader understanding of self comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, use of graphic and semantic organizers, question answering, question generation, knowledge of story structure, and summarization” (p. 4-69).

In a study conducted by Palinscar and Brown (1984), students were taught multiple comprehension strategies through a rigid sequence of events labeled reciprocal teaching. Four comprehension strategies were taught: prediction, questioning, self-monitoring, and summarization. Students were taught 20 lessons in using these strategies as they read text. As a portion of the text was read to students, a student leader posed questions and the students attempted to respond. Then all students were invited to
converse to seek clarifications, ask questions, and make predictions about the text. Students in the group that experienced the direct teaching of reading strategies and then conversed with other students about using the strategies did the best on tests of comprehension.

**Modeling.** Research is clear that for struggling readers, teachers must teach reading strategies directly and explicitly (Duffy et al., 1987; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Researchers argue that teachers tell students to use reading strategies, but they do not model how to use them (Durkin, 1979; Leinhardt et al., 1981).

Vygotsky’s theory of proximal development correlates with the modeling aspect of reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) because the skilled reader collaborates with the unskilled reader to model his or her thought processes during reading strategy usage. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of proximal development is the “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined in problem solving in collaboration with a more knowledgeable other” (p. 86). For progression of reading development, the instructor must work within the child’s zone of proximal development and model their thought processes as they use reading strategies. Therefore the child can build on his or her background knowledge to acquire new knowledge through their interaction with more skillful others. Then the struggling reader practices the strategy under the direction of the skilled reader until he or she can use the reading strategy independently.

According to Simpson and Nist (2000), effective reading strategy instruction should be direct and explicit. The instructor should adequately describe the strategy,
discuss its importance, and model the process involved in using the strategy. The teacher should also explain where and when it is appropriate to use the strategy and suggest methods for the student to evaluate if the strategy is working. Simpson and Nist suggested that explicit instruction should involve guided practice situations where the students can apply the reading strategies to real life tasks. The teacher should provide the students with feedback on their practice attempts to help the learner grow.

Roehler and Duffy (1991) have defined talk-aloud and think-aloud as types of explicit modeling. In talk-aloud, the instructor presents the students with a task analysis for completing a task and asks the students questions to guide them through the process. During think-aloud, teachers share the actual cognitive processes that they go through when completing a task. Teachers must take caution to make sure that the modeling takes place in the context of a specific text. Therefore, the teachers avoid modeling an isolated skill, which does little to help students create meaning.

Duffy et al. (1987) explored the effects of directly explaining the mental acts affiliated with strategic reading. Although their study was conducted with third grade teachers in low reading groups, the findings have implications for middle school struggling learners. The implications bring to light the importance of all teachers explaining the mental reasoning associated with reading strategy usage. In the Duffy et al. study, explicit explanation of the mental processes associated with reading strategies increased struggling readers’ awareness of the content and raised their consciousness of when to be strategic in reading. The subjects were divided into treatment and control groups. The teachers in the treatment group were taught how to teach their students the
mental processes that accompany reading strategy usage. Students in the treatment group were more aware of when and how to use strategies. The treatment group also performed better on nontraditional and standardized tests.

The National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000) believes that teachers require instruction in explaining what they are teaching, modeling their thought processes, encouraging student inquiry, and student engagement. Teachers require in-depth formal instruction in reading comprehension beginning at their pre-service training in order to model reading strategy usage effectively. Moore et al. (1999) contended, “like masters with apprentices, expert teachers immerse students in a discipline and teach them how to control it. They teach reading, writing, and thinking strategies that enable students to explore and think about subject matter” (p. 104).

**Discussion to Create Meaning**

**Discussion to make meaning of text.** Time spent discussing literature with other students is vital to helping struggling adolescent readers make meaning of literature and connect text to their lives (Almasi, 1995; McMahon, 1997; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). Although research constantly reiterates the importance of a social collaboration in learning (Cambourne, 2000; Knoester, 2009), remedial reading programs often focus on passive reading activities, failing to engage students in social collaboration (Allen, Swearington, & Kostelnik, 1993). Eisner (2002) argued that no sound reason exists, other than tradition, for instruction to be presented verbally with a written or oral response expected from students.
Literacy learning is a social experience that is enhanced by interchange and communication with others (Rosenblatt, 1978). Rosenblatt (1994) wrote:

Learning what others have made of text can greatly increase such insight into one’s own relationship with it. A reader who has been moved or disturbed by a text often manifests an urge to talk about it, to clarify, and crystallize his sense of the work. He likes to hear others’ views. . . . Perhaps we should consider the text as an even more general medium of communication among readers. As we exchange experiences, we point to those elements of the text that best illustrate or support our interpretations. We may help one another to attend to words, phrases, images, scenes, that we have overlooked or slighted. We may be led to reread the text and revise our own interpretation. Sometimes we may be strengthened in our own sense of “having done justice” to the text, without denying its potentialities for other interpretations. Sometimes the give and take may lead to a general increase in insight and even to a consensus. (p. 146)

Literacy learning is linked with social experiences such as “talking, interacting, thinking, valuing, and believing” (Gee, 1996, p. 41). Nussbaum (2003) contended that group discussions lead to text comprehension and that ability to engage in meaningful discussion is an important component of literacy learning.

Further theoretical research provides a foundation that supports the inclusion of discussion to making meaning time into a balanced reading program. Vygotsky (1978) believed that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and one’s learning potential is stimulated by interaction, collaboration and guidance from more proficient
others. Vygotsky suggested that children have great learning potential under the
guidance or assistance of more able others. Concurring with Vygotsky’s findings, Au
(1993) suggested that when students participate in reciprocal teaching and modeling with
their teacher or other students, peer-led discussions can be meaningful learning
experiences. Vygotsky’s and Au’s theories demonstrate that struggling readers have
great potential to learn if given the opportunity to interact with other members of their
social group. Bryan, Fawson, and Reutzel (2003) claimed that small group literature
discussions with another person such as peers, teachers, or adult volunteers during
sustained silent reading time reduces unengaged students’ off-task behaviors and
increases student engagement.

Furthermore, Greene (2000) contended that placing children in situations where
they have opportunity to engage in free speech empowers children to develop their own
voices so that they can be heard in the world. Greene contended that reading and
discussing literature teaches children that sometimes there are no right answers; the
answer lies in how one makes meaning of the question. The role of the teacher is to
encourage students to reflect and think about their own thinking. According to Doll
(1993), a curriculum built on a foundation of postmodern ideals focuses on the students
dialoguing, rather than passively receiving knowledge from the teacher. Post modernism
is defined as:

Theory that states that we are in a particular cultural period defined by the
abandonment of the belief in science and other rational linear thinking and
dominated by mass culture and the overwhelming abundance of technological communication. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 261)

Doll (1993) wrote:

Once one moves beyond seeking certainty, it is possible to see indeterminacy as that which encourages, indeed entices, us to participate in the generation of meaning. The openness of indeterminacy invites us to dialogue with the situation at hand, to communicate with it and with each other. (p. 283)

Studies regarding discussion. Broughton and Fairbanks (2002) examined four adolescent girls’ responses as they discussed their lives and literature through a classroom book club. Based on Rosenblatt’s (1978) work, Broughton and Fairbanks encouraged students to make meaning by exploring their lives in relation to the literature that they were reading and discussing. She found that the four girls used the text as an instrument for making sense of their lives. Broughton and Fairbanks found that the social interactions during the book club discussions provided the girls with alternatives for interpreting the actions of others, new ways of looking at moral dilemmas and increased the girls understanding.

Knoester (2009) studied urban youth’s reading habits. He interviewed 10 students, their parents, and the students’ homeroom teachers. He found that all 10 parents reported that their child enjoyed talking about what they read. Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater and Turner’s (2002) study of 24 struggling, resistant readers in grades three through five found that social collaboration and discussion motivated the students to spend more time reading.
Time Spent Reading

Benefits of time spent reading. Time spent reading advances the reading development of struggling readers (Gardiner, 2001). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; 2004) update found that at ages 9, 13, and 17 students who reported that they read fewer than five pages per day had lower reading levels than those students who said that they read more pages. Reading more pages in school and at home is correlated with higher student reading assessment scores. Students who said they read for fun had higher reading scores on NAEP. Students who are engaged with reading can overcome known barriers to reading achievement such as: income, parental education, and gender issues. The NAEP (1998) study found that for 9-year-olds, the correlation of time spent reading to comprehension was higher than any other demographic factor such as income or ethnic group association. Children from low income and low education families who spent time in engaged reading outscored students who came from higher economic situations but who were less motivated readers.

Many adolescents do not read anything outside of the school environment unless their teachers assign it for homework. Many adolescents rush through independent reading homework to get to activities that they view as more enjoyable. However, students who read frequently have more developed literacy skills and attain higher grades (Gardiner, 2001). Researchers claim that as students progress through school their interest in reading decreases (Bean, 2002; Guthrie, 2004; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Adolescents’ schedules outside of school are filled
with many activities. Unfortunately, reading outside of school often is not one of them when adolescents decide activities they will engage (Bean, 2002).

Krashen (1993) suggested that in 93% of the reading comprehension tests he examined, students who were given more reading time and assigned reading performed as well or better than students who did not have allotted reading time. Time spent reading correlates with success in academics, vocabulary development, attitude toward reading, assessment performance, and vocabulary acquisition (Moore et al., 1999). Leinhardt et al. (1981) studied students identified as reading disabled. The results of the study held that an increase of five minutes of reading daily would be needed to produce a month’s growth on standardized tests of reading achievement.

Regrettably, the many adolescents who do not read lag behind those students who do read for leisure. Alarmingly, Early (1984) found that middle school students do not spend a great deal of time reading. Furthermore, Krashen (1993) found that few children, especially adolescents, engage in voluntary reading. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) contends that 13-year-olds who do not read for pleasure have low reading ability and that they tend to avoid recreational reading (National Institute for Literacy, 2002). A study by Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found that a difference exists in the volume of reading that high level readers and low achieving readers complete. A decline in the amount of books that struggling learners read further intensifies their reading problems (Worthy et al., 2002). However, reading for pleasure is pertinent to the students’ reading development. Allington (2001) challenged American educators, with his words:
Our schools create more students who can read than students who do read. Too many students and adults read only when they are required to. Interest in voluntary reading begins to fall in the upper elementary grades and declines steeply in middle school and continues to fall across high school. (p. 8)

Allington suggested that the most obvious strategy for improving reading achievement of adolescents is increasing the amount of time that they engage in silent reading. Allington (1980) found that teachers rarely ask struggling readers to read independently and that they do not read as much in school as good readers. Thus, they have few opportunities to practice their independent reading, and this deficit may contribute to their underachievement. Allington contended that struggling readers need to read more if they are going to become better readers. Because they do or do not engage in reading for pleasure, Ivey (1999) found that many students experience the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986): the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

**Teachers.** Teachers can increase student time spent reading by recommending appropriate, engaging books that will appeal to students’ interest and encourage them to read. Bryan et al. (2003) held that literature discussions with another person during sustained silent reading time reduces student off-task behaviors and increases their engagement. Bean (2002) stated, “Recreational reading can help adolescents achieve in school, but teachers must provide students with books that both address the curriculum and meet their needs and interests” (p. 34). Finding the level that the student is reading independently and providing the reader with choices of high interest reading materials at this reading level open the door to reading for pleasure for the struggling reader, who
struggles to comprehend grade level content material or literature. “Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of material they can and want to read” (Moore et al., 1999, p. 4).

Studies. Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama (1990) had 195 students read 16 minutes in school per day and 15 minutes at home to measure the relationship between volume and reading achievement of 165 fifth and sixth grade average-achieving students. They found that the minutes of silent reading per day during reading class contributed to individual reading achievement growth while time spent on reading at home did not. The aforementioned study demonstrates the need for teachers to intervene to help students create more meaningful out-of-school reading experiences. Richard Allington (2001) suggested that teachers need to aid students and their parents in planning out of school reading experiences by assigning high interest, grade appropriate materials for students to read at home. Worthy et al. (2002) studied 24 resistant, struggling readers in third through fifth grade. The study involved a book club where college graduate and undergraduate students tutored the 24 participants after school. The authors found that students increased their time spent reading and reading achievement. The factors that the authors felt improved participant time spent reading and reading achievement are as follows: social interaction, interesting materials, and the tutors taking responsibilities for the tutees’ success.

Limitations of independent reading. The National Reading Panel (2000) subgroup report on reading fluency found that although encouraging students to read on their own may be beneficial, research has not determined that independent student reading time increases reading achievement and reading fluency because not enough
rigorous studies support this finding. Another concern is the question as to whether students are engaged in meaningful reading during independent reading time. If adolescents do not connect to the books they are reading, then they become good at staring at the pages of the book (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2002). Furthermore, Allington (1980) found that good readers read twice as many words during independent reading time as their struggling reader classmates.

Chapter Summary

Intervention programs for struggling adolescent readers should be intensive, individualized, and well-designed (Allington, 1994; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Campbell & Howard, 1993). Struggling readers need additional, accelerated instruction (Allington, 1994) if they are going to “catch up” with their reading proficient peers. Vocabulary and text discussion, reading strategy instruction, and time-spent reading are important aspects of a balanced reading intervention program. Intervention should promote a social community of learners to support students in making meaning of what they read (Rosenblatt, 1994; Vygotsky, 1962). Intervention instruction must include teachers modeling and practicing reading strategies with struggling readers in order for students to become independent users of strategies (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999). Reading intervention should also include time for students to read (Bean, 2002). Intervention must encourage the improvement of reading engagement by introducing struggling readers to high interest reading materials at their independent reading levels (Guthrie, 2004; Routman, 2003). Furthermore, it must address the negative feelings that years of reading failure have caused in the struggling learner (Henk & Melnick, 1995).
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 describes the research design, the setting and participants, the method of gaining entry, and the data collection and data analysis procedures executed in this study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine adolescents’ interactions and experiences during an after-school program. The study investigated what happened to the participants’ cognitive reading development based on their experience with the following aspects of the program: vocabulary development, reading strategy usage, discussion to create meaning, and time spent reading. This case study also examined the struggling adolescents’ affective reading development in the areas of reader self-perception and engagement with reading as they participated in the after-school literacy-based program.

Research Design

The research design of this study is a qualitative case study, which provided an “intensive, holistic description” and was “interpretive in nature” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). The study was interpretive, qualitative research in the sense that it focused on understanding the phenomena (the after-school program) in its natural setting through the meanings the participants brought to it with their actions and their words (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Stake, 1998).

A non-experimental case study of a single unit or bounded system was implemented (Smith, 1978). Case study research provided me with the opportunity to
enact multiple methods of data collection (Merriam, 1998). The case study investigated the bounded system or phenomena of the after-school program. The interactions and experiences of three students who participated in the after-school program represented a subset of the phenomena (Yin, 1994). The after-school program or “quintain” is understood better through an investigation of its three embedded cases (participants). The three case studies were explored both individually and simultaneously to provide multiple perspectives of the program, evidence of the phenomenon, and triangulation (Birnbaum, Enig, & Fisher, 2003). Because this interpretive qualitative case study shares the participants’ voices and actions as they participated in the after-school program, it provides an “in-depth” understanding of their experiences and activities in the program and subsequently provides “meaning of the phenomenon or case” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). “We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experiences” (Stake, 1998, p. 95).

**Researcher’s Role**

My role was that of an observer, teacher, and director of the after-school program that was explored in this case study. “Case study entails immersion in the setting and rests on both the researcher’s and the participants’ worldviews” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 61). I interacted with the students for the months of April, May, and June for approximately eight hours per week for an eight-week period, as shown in Table 1.

**Data Collection**

The primary data collection method was qualitative and included 16 audiotaped sessions during the 32 sessions that I spent with the participants. Audiotaped
Table 1

*Types and Duration of Data Collection*

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*(table continues)*
Table 1 (continued)

*Types and Duration of Data Collection*

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<th>Data Collection Method</th>
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<td>5-25</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
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<td>4-27</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>5-26</td>
<td>Audio-Tape Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-28</td>
<td>Audio-Tape Field Notes</td>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>Individual Interview 3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>6-2</td>
<td>Reading Inventory</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-2</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group 3 Reading Inventory</td>
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</table>

Transcriptions provided an in-depth description of the after-school program through the participants’ perspectives: their actions (what they did) and their voices (what they said); and were a vital component of the study (Birnbaum et al., 2003; Stake, 1998). Individual student interviews and focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. Field-notes, informal assessments, and students’ sketchbooks were collected. In addition, quantitative data such as report card grades, state mandated Ohio Proficiency Test scores, and informal reading inventory scores were examined. Data collected from the aforementioned sources yielded “vivid detail” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 159), and utilizing the various methods of data collection afforded the study “triangulation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). “By combining methods, [I] can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies” (Denzin, 1970, p. 301).
Research Plan

Setting

**The community.** The case study was conducted in a suburban school district in Northeast Ohio, located next to one of Ohio’s big eight urban districts. The population of the community was 31,627 people registering an average income of $32,216 at the time of the study (Census, 2000). The community had one high school containing grades 9 through 12, two middle schools containing grades 5 through 8, and five elementary schools housing grades kindergarten through 4. The school district was in the process of building a new middle school, which was intended as the central housing for all students in the district who were enrolled in grades six, seven, and eight. One of the community’s fifth through eighth grade buildings was to close when the central building location opened. The other middle building was to be converted to a central building designed to house grades four and five. This building, Page Middle School (pseudonym), was the setting of this study. It housed grades five through eight, but was slated to become a fourth and fifth grade building in 2007 after the construction project in the district was completed. The remaining four elementary buildings would then house grades kindergarten through grade three.

**The school.** The middle school setting in which this study took place had a student population of 713 students at the time of the study. Three hundred sixty-three male students and 350 female students attended the school building. The population divided by grade levels was as follows: fifth grade student population, 159; sixth grade student population, 170; seventh grade student population, 191; eighth grade student
population, 181. Sixty certified and 28 non-certified staff were employed at the school. The building also employed two guidance counselors and two principals. Two hundred forty-five (34.4%) students of the school’s population received free or reduced lunch services. The racial break down of the school population was as follows: Caucasian, 596 students; African-American, 91 students; and other, 25 students.

**The after-school program.** The district was in the first year of implementing a grant-funded after-school program at three sites at the time of the study. Two of the after-school programs were housed at the middle school locations; the other was housed at an elementary building. The after-school program began in October 2004 and operated until June 2005. The students attended the center from 3:30 until 6:30, Monday through Thursday. The students were not permitted to miss more than three days per month. The after-school learning center staff consisted of one director, one teacher, and two mentors each night. I served as the director of the after-school program, and was also a teacher and literacy coach at the school during regular school daytime hours.

In order to qualify for participation in the after-school program, students demonstrated poor academic performance as indicated by school report grades and poor proficiency scores, and were socio-economically disadvantaged as indicated by qualification to receive free and reduced lunch services. The students received a free hot dinner each night. They also participated in two hours of physical activities weekly, such as kickboxing, aerobics, Pilates, yoga, or dance. They participated in one-hour group-counseling services, one night a week, for a 10-week period with a local counseling agency. The focus of the group counseling sessions were activities and discussions
related to bullying prevention and acceptance. Each night the students participated in tutoring sessions and a 30-minute reading instruction and reciprocal teaching period. The after-school program also provided visits to various community sites such as: the community skating rink, movie theatre, bowling alley, obstacle course, and a local pet shelter in hopes of fostering social skill development in students beyond the school setting.

Guest speakers such as a magician, rocket builder, dental hygienist, math game facilitator, recycling awareness speaker, and a drug awareness speaker spoke to the students about their expertise. Various volunteers from local universities and high school National Honor Societies also came on a weekly basis to tutor students and help them with homework.

I facilitated a small, guided reading group setting for the three students in the case study. The small group setting occurred in the natural setting of one of the sixth grade classrooms utilized by the after-school program, which also served as my classroom during the school day regular hours (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The room came equipped with tables for reading strategy and discussion time. It also had beanbag chairs and a carpet area where the students usually chose to sit during independent reading time. The room contained a vast library filled with books, magazines, and newspapers for the students in the study to use during independent reading time. The classroom was painted in dark red, white, and blue to signify school colors.

I relished the use of my classroom for the study and after-school program because we had easy access to both my classroom supplies and supplies provided by the
after-school program. Furthermore, the students were comfortable in the setting, as they had spent much time there prior to the study’s onset. A slight problem with using this room was that it was the central starting and ending location for the after-school program so if parents came early to pick up their children it may have distracted the students in the study. Since early excusals counted as missed days and students were only permitted to miss three days per month, this distraction did not occur frequently.

**Aspects of the Program**

Because I was the director of the after-school program, one of my roles was to design curriculum and instruction. I had the opportunity to utilize the findings of the literature that I reviewed for Chapter 2 of this study as well as research-based practices that I analyzed in past endeavors to design curriculum and instruction (Guthrie, 2004; Kos, 1991; Shearer et al., 2001). I designed the after-school program with the intent of fostering the two areas of reading development in my participants as follows: cognitive reading development and affective reading development.

In the area of cognitive reading development, I planned curriculum and instruction targeted at building four important aspects of reading development in the struggling adolescent reader population. The four cognitive aspects of the program were as follows: vocabulary, discussion to make meaning, reading strategy usage, and time spent reading. I also designed activities to foster the students’ affective reading development. In reviewing the literature in the area of affective adolescent reading development, the main emerging aspects of reading that I explored and wanted to foster in my participants were: engagement with reading and positive reader self-perception.
The three students participated in vocabulary building exercises, reading strategy instruction, and discussions to create meaning. They read high-interest reading materials to improve their engagement with reading, their perception of themselves as readers, and their reading comprehension skills. Table 2 provides an overview of these aspects of the program.

Table 3 provides a typical schedule that I followed during the 32 sessions that I met with the three participants. The schedule was not followed the first introductory night of the study or during testing, interview, and focus group sessions. The following section briefly details the types of interactions and activities that occurred in each of the 32 two-hour sessions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Discussion to Make Meaning</th>
<th>Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Independent Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flashcard Activities (Word Sorts, Alphabetical Order, Matching Game, Parts of Speech)</td>
<td>Peer-led Discussion of Novels and Short Stories</td>
<td>Modeling of Reading Strategies by Program Staff</td>
<td>Books on Tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Wall Activities</td>
<td>Discussion of Focus Group Questions</td>
<td>Independent Practice of Reading Strategies in Work Samples</td>
<td>Independent Reading Time Each Session of Self-selected Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss Vocabulary During Peer-led Discussion Time</td>
<td>Peer-led Discussion of Reading Strategies</td>
<td>Games</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modeling of Discussions of Text by Staff and Students</td>
<td>Reciprocal Teaching of Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Time Devoted to Each Aspect of the Program per Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time Devoted to the Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading Time</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategy Instruction Time</td>
<td>35 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion To Make Meaning Time</td>
<td>35 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Instruction Time</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Vocabulary.** Students worked with program staff in vocabulary and word attack development for the eight and one-half week period. Vocabulary sessions included students selecting vocabulary words from their environment, learning about the words, and then teaching the word to a small group of peers. The students’ task was to select an unfamiliar word that intrigued them that they had either heard or read. The word could be a word that they heard another person say, a word that they heard in a song, or a word they read in the after-school program or one of their content subjects. The students’ task prior to coming to the after-school program was to first write down what they thought the word meant, and then to learn the meaning of the new word through dialogue with another person, using context clues or consulting a reference material.

The three participants interacted with the vocabulary in the original context that they first encountered the word and created new context for the vocabulary to demonstrate that they comprehended the word’s meaning. I decided to use this method because it was an effective practice that I had used in my Title I and regular reading classes for years to help struggling readers build their vocabulary and improve their reading comprehension. It had proved a highly engaging and meaningful activity for my former students. Thus, the three struggling readers in my case study had an opportunity to learn new vocabulary words through their interaction with the word and in their dialogue with one another regarding the words. The group discussed the word until a consensus was reached regarding the word’s meaning, and then the presenter shared the meaning that they collected. Students also shared the part of speech of the word and used the words in sentences.
Each participant created a sketchbook with word walls in which they added new words each session. We also displayed a large word wall in the classroom; we added words during each session, and reviewed them weekly. Once the word wall became full, as it often did, participants removed the words and added them to large boxes that they had designed and labeled with words and pictures representing nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Participants periodically reviewed the words in the boxes by sorting, alphabetizing them, or doing other activities with them. The word was displayed on one side of the sentence strip and the definition was written on the back of word wall word to make independent review of the words easy.

Each student also had 30 vocabulary flashcards that they reviewed each night with a program aide. The flashcard words came from their sixth-grade reading text, proficiency preparatory materials, or difficult word wall words. Since the school had the practice of placing each sixth grade student in the same reading text regardless of their reading ability, I felt it was beneficial to give the students in the study extra exposure and practice with the vocabulary words since they were not reading at a sixth grade level. A program aide flashed the cards to the students and discussed the vocabulary words with them each night. The students also played games with the words such as sorting, alphabetizing the words, or using them in sentences. The word cards had the vocabulary word written on one side of the card and the definition was written on the other side. Once program aides felt a word was mastered, it was placed in a file box for the student and a new word was added to the student’s envelope. At the end of the program, file
boxes containing vocabulary words were sent home with participants for summer practice.

**Discussion to make meaning time.** Discussion to make meaning time involved conversation with regard to what participants read, their feelings toward reading, their perceptions of themselves as readers, and their feelings about the progress they were making as readers. At the beginning of the study, the other teachers and I provided extensive modeling and scaffolding of what a meaningful discussion of text may look like.

**Reading strategy instruction.** The students participated in research-based reading strategy instruction. I modeled reading strategy usage and the thought processes that accompany reading strategy use. Then, the students modeled the reading strategy for one another and had the opportunity for independent practice of the reading strategy during homework/tutoring group time in their content area subjects as well as in their reading homework. Students also defined and explained how they used reading strategies in focus group and individual interviews as the study progressed.

**Time spent reading.** Participants had opportunities each session to independently read high-interest adolescent reading materials at their independent reading levels and later to discuss the materials in their discussion group. Students were also permitted to listen to books on tape during this time.

For example, the three participants in the case study listened to and read *Holes* (Sachar, 2001) and *A Long Way From Chicago* (Peck, 1998) to increase their engagement with reading. The students selected the books they would listen to through voting.
Websites or WebPages of publishers such as Scholastic and Arte Publico Press were also used to select high interest adolescent literature. Furthermore in the text, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers, Designing Research-Based Programs* (Allington, 2001), I found several resources that helped me motivate the reluctant preteen readers in my study such as: *Rip-Roaring Reads for Reluctant Teen Readers*, and *Libraries Unlimited*. During the after-school literacy based program, the participants also visited the public library twice to hear the librarian give book talks on books that the students could select for independent reading time. I consulted many of the preceding resources to encourage the three students in the study to select books that aligned with their interests and independent reading levels.

**Reader self-perception.** For the purposes of this study, I defined reader self-perception as how the students felt about themselves as readers. Students discussed how they felt about themselves and others as readers during individual interviews and focus group interviews. It was my hope that matching students with high interest reading materials on their independent reading levels, teaching them reading strategies, allowing them opportunity to read and make meaning of text through discussion, and increasing their vocabulary acquisition would improve their reading and their feelings about themselves as readers. I compared interview responses from the beginning, middle, and end of the program, and compared pre-and post-scores on the *Reader Self-Perception Assessment* (Henk & Melnick, 1995) to examine participant growth in this area.

**Reading engagement.** For the purpose of this study, I defined engagement as what the participants stated they felt about reading and their behaviors with regard to
reading that demonstrated their feelings regarding reading. Students discussed how they felt about reading during individual and focus group interviews. It was my hope that matching students with high interest reading materials on their independent reading levels, and providing them with best practice reading instruction would improve their reading and their feelings about reading. I compared interview responses from the beginning, middle, and end of the program to explore participant growth in this area.

**Participant Selection**

Twenty-three students participated in the after-school program. The study was primarily a qualitative case study; thus, the sampling method was conducted as a non-probability sampling. Originally four 6th grade students were “purposefully” selected for participation in the study (Merriam, 1998). “Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Due to the overwhelming amount of data yielded by the examination of the four participants’ experiences in six aspects of the after-school program, one participant was dropped from the study. Sophia, the dropped case, was the highest performing of the four struggling readers. Her name and dialogue still appear throughout the study in some group conversations, but her case data was not analyzed. In addition, the case study of the three remaining participants provided a close examination of detail that may have been lost in a larger study that included a larger sample (Merriam, 1998). The three 6th grade participants (cases) whose data (experiences, interactions, actions, and words) were analyzed are as follows: Aden, Emily, and Meredith.
Sixth grade students were targeted for participation in the study because the after-school staff and school staff indicated that students at this grade level could benefit most from participation in this study. According to the learning center staff, sixth grade students who participated in the after-school program had the largest amount of homework and the most intense curriculum due to the Ohio Proficiency Test. I selected students from the same grade level to increase the amount of attention each child would receive since the students needed assistance with similar content area subject matter.

I also selected sixth grade participants in hopes that they would be able to better articulate their experiences as struggling readers than younger participants. Results of the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008) assessment also affected my selection of the participants. In order to create appropriately designed guided reading groups, I wanted to study students who were functioning relatively at the same independent and instructional reading levels. The three participants were all functioning approximately at a fifth grade instructional level and a fourth-fifth grade independent reading level according to the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2001).

I selected participants who were struggling sixth grade readers. For the purpose of the study, I defined struggling readers as students who were reading below a sixth grade level and who did not have a diagnosed learning disability. I knew the three students from my experience as a fifth and sixth grade reading teacher at the middle school and as the director of the after-school program. I understood that the three aforementioned students could greatly benefit from participation in the study. All three students struggled with content area subjects due to their struggles with reading. I taught
two of the students in the study, Emily and Aden as their sixth grade social studies teacher during the study. I was also the Aden’s fifth grade reading teacher the year prior to the study. I had not taught Meredith prior to her enrollment in the after-school program.

**Participant reading history.** The three students who participated in the study were as follows: Emily (pseudonym), Meredith (pseudonym), and Aden (pseudonym). Emily was female, 12 years, 0 months. Meredith was female, 12 years, 3 months. Aden was a male, 11 years, 11 months. Emily was of Caucasian ethnicity and lived with her mother, father, and brother. Meredith was of Caucasian ethnicity and lived with her mother, grandfather, and sister. She visited her father on weekends, and he often picked her up from the after-school program throughout the week. Aden was of Arabic ethnicity and lived with his mother, sister, and brother. He visited his father often, staying with him at the store he owned. He also had a sister who was married with one child, and lived in another state.

These students were selected to participate in the study based on several criteria. All three participants failed the *Ohio Proficiency Reading Test* in fourth grade with scores as follows: Emily, 209; Meredith, 209; and Aden, 214. A score of 217 was required for passage. Aden, Meredith, and Emily were enrolled in the school’s Title One Reading Program as a result of their fourth grade proficiency test results. Title One programs at Page Middle School replaced the students’ regular reading or math courses; thus, they did not participate in regular reading or math courses if they qualify for Title
One reading or math courses. Table 4 presents demographic data about each study participant.

**Reader profiles.**

*Aden.* Aden, outgoing, kind, and eager to please had struggled with reading since the beginning of his school career (personal communication with mother, PC-4/4-B). A factor that appeared to affect his early language acquisition was the bilingual nature of his home environment. Of mid-eastern ethnicity, his family spoke both English and Arabic in their home but tended to favor the Arabic language as a means for communication, according to his mother. He received English as a second language tutoring in grades two, three, and four.

*Emily.* Emily, an outspoken leader, often exhibited behaviors that interfered with her learning and hindered her growth as a reader. When her behavior issues dissipated, she did not display many of the attributes of the struggling reader noted throughout her school career (School File Analysis, 4/4-B).

*Meredith.* Meredith, mature beyond her years, was introspective, soft-spoken, and even sullen at times. After brief interaction with her, one was left with the unsettling feeling that in her short existence, life had not been kind to her. She became a great discussion leader as the study progressed, but it took her time to feel comfortable with the other participants and me. It may have been a combination of both the fact that I had not been her teacher previously and her reserved personality.
Table 4

Demographic Data for Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>4th Grade Proficiency Scores (217 Required for Passage)</th>
<th>California Achievement Test Scores and date of Test Administration</th>
<th>Grade 5 Metropolitan Achievement Reading Level Scores</th>
<th>5th Grade Reading Report Card Grade</th>
<th>6th Grade Reading Report Card Grade</th>
<th>Other Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>209 Percentile Score 41</td>
<td>Instructional Grade 4 Independent Grade 3 Frustration Grade 5</td>
<td>B, C, D, C Final C</td>
<td>D, C</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Began Title 1 services during fifth grade year for reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>209 Percentile Score 46</td>
<td>Instructional Grade 3 Independent Grade 2 Frustration Grade 5</td>
<td>D, C, C, F, Final D</td>
<td>C, C</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Title One (in 1st grade) Tested out in second grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-(Requal-ified for Title1 services in grade 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Third grade teacher requested MFE but IAT team decided not to test.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aden</td>
<td>214 Percentile Score 40</td>
<td>Instructional Grade 3 Independent Grade 2 Frustration Grade 5</td>
<td>C, B, C, C Final C (Title One Reading Grades)</td>
<td>C, D</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ESL tutor for grades 2, 3, 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Began Title 1 services during fifth grade.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

Gaining Entry

I contacted the school’s central administration and the building’s two principals, and permission was granted to conduct the study. I then contacted the students who participated in the study and their parents to explain the study to them. Application was made to the University Human Subjects Review Board, and approval was granted. I obtained written consent from the children’s parents/guardians and the children themselves. Permission to audiotape was also obtained. During the eight and one-half week period, the students met with me for approximately eight hours weekly during after-school program hours. Sixteen of these sessions were audiotaped as were student interviews and focus group interviews.

Instrumentation

Basic Reading Inventory. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during this research study. I administered comprehension and sight word assessments at the beginning and end of the eight and one-half week period, which yielded qualitative and quantitative data. I used the Basic Reading Inventory: Pre-Primer Through Grade Twelve and Early Literacy Assessment (BRI; Johns, 2008) to assess the students in the aforementioned areas. Alternate forms of the assessment were used at the beginning and end of the study. The BRI is an informal inventory, which offers both qualitative and quantitative data. The BRI design allows administrators to select all or portions of the test to administer. The portions that were selected for this study included word lists, comprehension, and retellings assessments. The word lists were administered to
determine an estimation of the students’ reading ability and provide an estimation of the level at which the student should begin the comprehension section of the assessment. On the retelling section of the test, the student read the section silently, and then retold the story to me. The retelling permitted me to determine if the student could recall literary elements and the sequence of the story’s events, which indicated a measure of the student’s comprehension ability. The test provided criteria to help me determine the students’ independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. The BRI provides three forms for each level so different forms were used for pre-testing and post-testing. The pre-test and post-test results of the BRI are found in Table 5.

**State test scores and academic records.** Quantitative data were also obtained from the students’ fourth grade proficiency reading and writing test scores. Report cards were also examined.

**Student interviews and questionnaires.** Students were asked questions from several questionnaires. At the beginning of the study I administered an informal reading interest inventory (www.st.cr.k12ia.us/reading/interestinventoryA.htm). The questions were read orally by me and recorded on the questionnaire by the student. See Appendix A for the interest inventory questions. Students participated in informal interviews with me at the beginning and end of the eight and one-half week period. The students participated in focus group discussions with the other participants in the study and me (see Appendices B and C for interview and focus group questions). The interviews and focus group sessions were audiotaped. The focus group discussion and interviews for each participant were transcribed at the beginning, middle, and end of the study.
Table 5

*Participant Basic Reading Inventory Pre-Test and Post-Test Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-Test Vocabulary</th>
<th>Post-Test Vocabulary</th>
<th>Pre-Test Comprehension</th>
<th>Post-Test Comprehension</th>
<th>Pre-test Retelling</th>
<th>Post-test Retelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aden</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grade Three</td>
<td>Grade Three-Four</td>
<td>Grade Four</td>
<td>Grade Four</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Instructional/Independent</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Four</td>
<td>Grade Four-Five</td>
<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
<td>Unsatysfactory</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
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<td>Grade Four</td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
<td>Grade Four</td>
<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>Grade Seven</td>
<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>Grade Five-Six</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
<td>Unsatysfactory</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
<td>Grade Eight</td>
<td>Grade Six</td>
<td>Grade Six-Seven</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 5 (continued)

*Participant Basic Reading Inventory Pre-Test and Post-Test Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-Test Vocabulary</th>
<th>Post-Test Vocabulary</th>
<th>Pre-Test Comprehension</th>
<th>Post-Test Comprehension</th>
<th>Pre-test Retelling</th>
<th>Post-test Retelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>Independent Grade Three</td>
<td>Independent Grade Four</td>
<td>Independent Grade Four</td>
<td>Independent Grade Five</td>
<td>Grade 3 Excellent</td>
<td>Grade 3 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Grade Five</td>
<td>Instructional Grade Six</td>
<td>Instructional Grade Five-Six</td>
<td>Instructional Grade Six</td>
<td>Grade 4 Satisfactory</td>
<td>Grade 4 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Frustration Grade Six</td>
<td>Frustration Grade Six</td>
<td>Frustration Grade Six</td>
<td>Frustration Grade Six-Sevent</td>
<td>Grade 5 Satisfactory</td>
<td>Grade 5 Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 6 Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Grade 6 Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I selected questions for the focus group discussion that facilitated student conversation with regard to their feelings about reading, their engagement with reading, and their feelings about what they are learning in the program. The interview questions focused on the students’ individual perception of themselves as readers and how they felt they were personally progressing as readers. The interview questions were designed to gain information that the child might not have felt comfortable sharing in the focus group discussion. In both the individual and focus group interviews, I asked the students questions about their reading strategy knowledge and usage.

I also examined the students’ perception of themselves as readers at the beginning and end of the study by administering the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnik, 1995; see Appendix D). The assessment yielded subscale scores. The Progress subscale denoted past success, effort, the need for assistance, task difficulty and persistence, and feelings related to instructional worth. The Observational Comparison subtest had the participants compare themselves to their perceptions of peers’ performance. The Social Feedback subscale referred to the participants’ perceptions of input from their teachers, peers, and family members. The Physiological States subscale examined the internal feelings the participants experienced during reading.

Analysis for this scale included raw-score data in the following four areas: Progress, with a total raw score of 45; score interpretation for this subscale is as follows: high: 44+, average: 39, and low: 34. Observational Comparison had a total raw score of 30; score interpretation yields high: 26+, average: 21, and low: 16. Social Feedback had a total raw score of 45 with score interpretations as follows: high: 38+, average: 33, and
Physiological States had a total raw score of 40 with score interpretation being: high: 37+, average: 31, and low: 25. The higher the raw score for each sub-scale, the more confident the child felt towards his or her reading ability.

**Audiotapes.** Sixteen sessions were audiotaped and are referred to in Chapter 4 as taped sessions. Taped sessions one and two occurred the first week of the study; taped sessions three and four occurred the second week of the study; taped sessions five and six occurred the third week of the study; taped sessions seven and eight occurred the fourth week of the study (midpoint); taped sessions 9 and 10 occurred the fifth week of the study; taped sessions 11 and 12 occurred the sixth week of the study; taped sessions 13 and 14 occurred the seventh week of the study; and taped sessions 15 and 16 occurred the eighth week of the study. When referencing the 32 sessions in general I referred to them in chronological order by the date on which they occurred.

I used the audiotapes to add information to my field note entries. I transcribed six sessions at the beginning of the study, five sessions at the middle of the study, and five sessions at the end of the study. Student interviews and focus group discussions were also transcribed at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The video recorder was set behind the students so that it was out of the students’ eyesight and did not interfere with their responses. Table 6 contains data defining beginning, middle, and end of data collection dates. The weeks of 4/4 through 4/7 and the week of 5/31 through 6/2 also served as Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008) assessment administration.
Table 6

*Dates Defining Beginning, Middle and End of Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Taped Sessions</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Point in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 4, 2005-April 21</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 25, 2005-May 10</td>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 11, 2005-June 2</td>
<td>12-16</td>
<td>6.5-8.5</td>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Observations and field notes.** I also recorded field notes at the end of each session. I closely observed the students’ interactions with text and with one another as they attempted to gain meaning from what they read. I also observed the students in reading strategy sessions with another teacher and other students. I did this for two reasons. The first reason is I wanted to see if I missed anything in their actions and words regarding their use of reading strategies when I was focused on facilitating the reading strategy lessons. I also wanted to determine if they would volunteer to engage in the reciprocal teaching process in a larger group setting with students and a teacher who were not in our small group of three students. I wanted to determine if they would transfer what they had learned beyond the context of the guided reading group. Field notes were taken during and at the end of each session. I recorded exactly what activities and experiences the students participated in for that session, notes about the environment, and other comments. I also noted student behavior for the session. The field notes recorded the students’ difficulties as well as their strengths with regard to strategy usage, their engagement with reading, and their use of discussion to create meaning. The field notes included a list of books and other materials that students utilized during the study.

**Data Organization**

To answer the question, “What happened to struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive reading development during an after school program?” I defined cognitive reading development as indicators that the student is demonstrating text comprehension. I examined four aspects of cognitive reading development: vocabulary, discussion to make meaning, reading strategy usage, and time spent reading for each of the three
participants in the study. I organized the data by headings of student name, aspect of the program, and categories respectively.

Data from various sources provided rich description and triangulation. Table 7 outlines the data used to answer each research question and provide evidence of triangulation (Romeo, 1997). “Narrative codes” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 166) were utilized to report coded results from interviews, transcripts, and field notes and to detail the occurrences which provided insight to the research questions.
Table 7

Data Sources and Triangulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How will participation in an after-school program impact adolescents’ cognitive reading development?</td>
<td>• Individual student interviews (audio-taped with note taking)</td>
<td>a) Gathering of data from field notes, work samples, audiotape transcriptions, and documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus groups interviews (audio-taped with note taking)</td>
<td>b) Development of categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examination of documents in students’ files</td>
<td>c) Coding of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examination of report card reading grades</td>
<td>d) Organization of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examination of performance at the beginning and end of the study on The Basic Reading Inventory: Pre-Primer Through Grade Twelve And Early Literacy Assessment and The California Achievement Test.</td>
<td>e) Reduction &amp; development of new categories during data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student application of reading strategy usage in sketchbooks</td>
<td>f) Reporting of findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How will participation in an after-school program impact adolescents’ affective reading development?</td>
<td>• Observation and field note reports</td>
<td>a) Gathering and rereading of data from field notes, work samples, audiotape transcriptions, and examination of documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student interest inventories</td>
<td>b) Development of categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student sketchbook journals</td>
<td>c) Coding of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student focus group discussions.</td>
<td>d) Organization of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk &amp; Melnick, 1995)</td>
<td>e) Reduction &amp; development of new categories during data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student individual interviews</td>
<td>f) Reporting of findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations and field note entries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to answer research questions one and two, field notes, qualitative data from audiotaped transcript sessions, individual student interviews, focus group interviews, student work samples, and reading interest inventories were examined. To add further insight to question one, quantitative data were collected from proficiency test scores, report card grades, and the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008). To further answer question two, the Reader Self-Perception Test (Henk & Melnick, 1995) was administered. The triangulation of data agrees with suggested procedures in Merriam (1998) for case study data collection and analysis.

The four cognitive aspects of the program explored under the auspices of question one are as follows: vocabulary, discussion to make meaning, reading strategy development, and time spent reading. I begin the presentation of data related to question one with the background information regarding each participant’s vocabulary development. Although vocabulary and reading strategies are separate aspects of the program from discussion to make meaning, much of the participants’ learning of both reading strategies and vocabulary involved discussion. In addition during analysis of the data for both vocabulary and discussion to make meaning I found some of the same sub-categories.

The after-school reading program lasted eight and one-half weeks. To track changes over time, I divided data into beginning of the study (weeks 1–6; dates 4/4–4/21), middle of the study (weeks 7–11; dates 4/25–5/11), and end of the study (weeks 12–16; dates 5/12–6/2). I utilized the following symbols to denote data collected at the beginning (B), middle (M), and end (E) of the study. I also labeled each piece of data
with the following symbols: focus group (FG); individual interview (II); taped session (TS); field notes (FN); and personal communication (PC). For example, data collected during a focus group session on 4/11 was labeled (FG-4/11-B).

**Data Analysis**

Two research questions, “What happened to struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive reading development during an after school program?” and “What happened to struggling adolescent readers’ affective reading development during an after school program?” guided data collection and data analysis throughout this study. Several different data collecting techniques were utilized (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). The study sought to discover patterns in the individual participant’s (cases) experiences and responses as well as search for group patterns or themes across the three cases. Hence a cross case analysis was implemented (Stake, 1998). I examined theories about the after-school program through observation of the after-school program, interviews, and audio taping of the interactions and experiences of the participants. The vast amount of data gathered from the interviews, focus group discussions, audiotapes, and journals required significant reduction before any interpretation could be made.

The audiotapes were examined by two procedures. First, I listened to the 16 sessions, two per week, and then I transcribed them during the span of the study. I compared my field notes with the transcripts as I read and reread them. Student interviews were audio taped, recorded, and transcribed at the beginning, middle, and end of the study and were also read several times for clarity. Data analyses occurred concurrently with data collection as I analyzed the taped sessions, interviews, and field
notes during the study (Merriam, 1998). The field notes, interviews, work samples, and transcriptions were coded and placed into categories (cognitive data and affective data) based on aforementioned research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

**Research Results for Question One**

I then reread the data pieces related to the cognitive aspects of the program. I removed any data that did not answer the research questions. In the initial analysis of my data related to research question one, data fit nicely into the four cognitive aspects of the program (vocabulary, discussion to make meaning, reading strategy usage, and time spent reading). Within the area of vocabulary development the following categories became apparent: connections, fluency, discussion to make meaning, and demonstrated understanding. I first divided the vocabulary data into these categories. As I further read and reread the data, I merged the categories for vocabulary into two succinct categories with procedures suggested in Merriam (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) regarding the constant comparative method of category formation, which subsequently led to the development of emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). The final categories for vocabulary development are as follows: indicators of vocabulary understanding and indicators of lack of vocabulary understanding.

The aspect of the program entitled discussion to make meaning had several categories that originally become apparent: evidence of participation (high, moderate, or low), connection to self, connection to world, connection to text, and aiding others in meaning making. I first divided the discussion to make meaning data into these categories. As the study progressed and I further analyzed data, I merged the categories.
The categories for the discussion to make meaning were as follows after reduction: discussion to inform or demonstrate one’s understanding, and aiding others in meaning making. The final categories for discussion to make meaning are indicators of success at using discussion as a tool for making meaning and lack of indicators of student success at using discussion as a tool for meaning making.

At first, within the area of reading strategy development, the following categories became known: metacognition (thinking about one’s thinking), selection of strategies, and demonstration of appropriate use/understanding of reading strategies, modeling, and reciprocal teaching. Following procedures suggested in Merriam (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the constant comparative method of category formation, as I further read and reread the data, I merged the categories for reading strategy development into two succinct categories which led to the development of emerging findings. As the study progressed and I further analyzed data, I condensed categories into the following categories: understanding of reading strategies and reading strategy usage.

In the area of time-spent reading, the following categories initially emerged: book selection, degree on task (high, moderate, and low), teacher assistance, indicators that student spends time reading, and indicators that students do not spend time reading. As the study progressed and I further analyzed data, I reduced sub-categories. The final categories for time spent reading are as follows: indicators that the student spent time reading and indicators that the student did not spend time reading.

Table 8 displays the aspect of the program and the categories that originally emerged to answer research question number one, “How will participation in an after-school program
impact adolescents’ cognitive reading development?” Table 9 displays the results of the categories that I narrowed after careful analysis during the reading and rereading of the data that I collected.
Table 8

*Original Categories Cognitive Reading Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Time Spent Reading</th>
<th>Reading Strategy Use</th>
<th>Discussion to Make Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Book Selection</td>
<td>Metacognition (Thinking About One’s Thinking)</td>
<td>Participation (High, Moderate, Low)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion to Make Meaning</td>
<td>Degree on Task (High, Moderate, Low)</td>
<td>Selection of Strategies</td>
<td>Connection To Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>Teacher Assistance</td>
<td>Demonstrates Appropriate Use of Strategies</td>
<td>Connection To World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated Understanding</td>
<td>Indicators That Student Spends Time Reading</td>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Connection To Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indicators That Student Spends Time Reading</td>
<td>Reciprocal Teaching</td>
<td>Aiding Others In Meaning Making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Category Results From Constant Comparative Method: Cognitive Reading Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Discussion to Make Meaning</th>
<th>Reading Strategy Development</th>
<th>Time Spent Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators of Vocabulary Understanding</td>
<td>Indicators of Success at Using Discussion as a Tool For Making Meaning</td>
<td>Understanding Reading Strategies Definitions/Explanations (Knowledge of or lack of Knowledge when Defining Reading Strategies)</td>
<td>Indicators That Student spends Time Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators of Lack of Vocabulary Understanding</td>
<td>Lack of Indicators of Student Success at Using Discussion as a Tool for Meaning Making</td>
<td>Reading Strategy Usage (Uses Reading Strategies or Does Not Use Reading Strategies)</td>
<td>Indicators That Student Does Not Spend Time Reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results for Research Question Two

The second research question sought evidence for, “How did participation in an after school literacy based program impact adolescents’ affective reading development?” For the purpose of my study, I defined affective reading development as the individual’s perception of self as a reader and the individual’s engagement with reading. Both engagement (Guthrie, 2004) and self-perception (Henk & Melnick, 1995) are two important aspects of reading development in the adolescent population and considerably influence students’ reading growth. To answer the research question, I organized my data under headings of student name, aspect of the program and categories, respectively.

For the purpose of this study, I defined engagement as the individual’s feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward reading. For the purpose of this study, I defined reader self-perception as the reader’s feelings, attitudes, and behaviors regarding themselves and others as readers. I included data regarding how the participants viewed others as readers because their perception of other readers, in effect, may influence how they feel about themselves as readers.

Several categories emerged in the initial data analysis. For engagement, the following categories emerged: barriers to engagement, indicators that the student is engaged, indicators that the student is not engaged, positive feelings related to reading, and negative feelings related to reading. As I read and reread the data in the analysis process, I adhered to procedures found in Merriam (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the constant comparative method of category formation as I merged my categories as
follows: indicators that the student is engaged and indicators that the student is not engaged.

Under the area of reader self-perception, the following categories emerged originally: positive reader self-perception, negative reader self-perception, and hindrances to positive reader self-perception (attitudes, emotions), stress or anxiety related to reading, and perception of self in comparison to perception of other readers. As I read and reread the data in the analysis process, I redefined the categories as follows: negative reader self-perception, positive reader self-perception, and perception of others as readers. Table 10 displays the aspects of the program and the categories that surfaced to answer research question number two, “What happens to struggling readers’ affective reading development as they participate in an after-school program?” As I further analyzed the data I narrowed the categories into those displayed in Table 11.
Table 10

*Initial Categories for Engagement and Reader Self-Perception*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Reader Self-Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Engagement</td>
<td>Positive Reader Self-Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators That the Student is Engaged</td>
<td>Negative Reader Self-Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators That the Student Is Not Engaged</td>
<td>Hindrances to Positive Reader Self-Perception (attitudes, emotions, outside influences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Feelings Related to Reading</td>
<td>Stress or Anxiety Related to Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Feelings Related to Reading</td>
<td>Perception of Self Related to Perception of Others as Readers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 11

*Categories for Engagement and Reader Self-Perception After Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Reader Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators That Student Is Engaged</td>
<td>Indicators of Negative Reader Self-Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators That Student Is Not Engaged</td>
<td>Indicators of Positive Reader Self-Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of others as readers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trustworthiness

Reliability of the data analysis procedure was established by employing two raters to whom I explained the definitions, questions, and categories. They were given approximately 20% of data to categorize. The categories were formatted by the aforementioned questions. Eighty percent agreement with the categories was obtained. In order to establish interrater reliability, I met with two individuals who earned doctoral degrees at Kent State University. One earned her degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in literacy (rater one) and the other was awarded her degree in special education (rater two). I selected the individuals based on my familiarity with their scholarship and understanding of the research process.

I met with the raters at a public library. After I thoroughly explained and defined my categories, I shared 20% of my data with them. I asked them to place text segments of the data in envelopes labeled with the category names. Tables 12, 13, and 14 display the percentage of agreement found with each rater. In order to obtain the percentage, I divided the number of segments we agreed upon by the total number of segments I gave them. The percentage of agreement for each category was at least 80%, which Lombard, Synder-Duch, and Bracken (2002) held as an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability in qualitative research studies. The only exception was the category of negative reader self-perception, yielding a 71% agreement with rater two. Rater two, not having a literacy background, had difficulty distinguishing between the definitions of reader self-perception and reader engagement. Because I had high agreement in all other categories with rater two, and I had 100% agreement with inter-rater one in the negative
reader self-perception category, I felt the 71% agreement rating was attributed to specific literacy training rather than clarity of category definition. The discrepancy could have been reduced with more specific literacy training of the rater at the beginning of the session. Negative reader self-perception also had fewer data segments than the other categories. I met or exceeded the 80% point with both raters in all other areas.
Table 12

*Percentage of Interrater Reliability Agreement Across Categories and Sub-Categories (Cognitive Data)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rater One</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Discussion to</th>
<th>Discussion to Help</th>
<th>Understands</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Inform or</td>
<td>One Another</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>Does Not</td>
<td>Demonstrate</td>
<td>Make</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>One’s</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater One</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater Two</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13

*Percentage of Interrater Reliability Agreement Across Categories (Cognitive Data)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rater</th>
<th>Indicators Student Spends Time Reading</th>
<th>Indicators Student Does Not Spend Time Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rater One</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater Two</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14

*Percentage of Interrater Reliability Agreement Across Categories (Affective Data)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rater</th>
<th>Indicators that the Student is Engaged</th>
<th>Indicators that the Student is Not Engaged</th>
<th>Perception of Other Readers</th>
<th>Positive Reader Self-Perception</th>
<th>Negative Reader Self Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rater One</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater Two</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Chapter 3 details the research methods utilized in this study. A thick description of the setting, including the community, the school, the after-school program and the classroom used during the study are included (Merriam, 1998). The chapter also presents histories and profiles of the three students who participated in the case studies. The chapter presents the instrumentation that was used and its purposes. The method of gaining entry, data collection, and data analysis are also detailed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the interactions that occurred during an after-school program, which was designed to facilitate reading growth in struggling adolescent readers. To learn about the after-school program’s effectiveness, I studied three struggling readers’ behaviors (actions), their voices (words), and their interactions with one another. The study investigated the struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive development in the areas of vocabulary development, discussion to make meaning, reading strategy usage, and time spent reading. The study also explored the struggling adolescent readers’ engagement with reading and their perception of themselves as readers as they participated in the after-school program.

Research Questions

The participants’ perspectives, reading development, and interactions helped me to understand the case, the after-school literacy program. The program was designed to increase struggling readers’ cognitive and affective reading development. The research questions that provided focus for the study were as follows:

1. What happens to struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive reading development during their participation in an after school program?

2. What happens to struggling adolescent readers’ affective reading development during their participation in an after school program?
In order to answer the research questions, qualitative data from audio-taped sessions, individual student interviews, focus group interviews, field notes, and reading interest inventories were analyzed. Furthermore data were collected from proficiency test scores, report card grades, and two additional assessments: the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2001) and The Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Both the quantitative data and qualitative data helped answer the questions. The triangulation of data concurs with suggested procedures in Merriam (1998).

In this chapter, I present examples and analysis of each participant’s experiences, words, and actions in the after-school literacy program. The data are organized by participant name (case) and aspect of the program. Data for each case are organized by categories and subcategories. Then, I conduct a cross-case analysis for each aspect of the program and case. The data regarding Aden’s cognitive development is presented first followed by the cognitive data for both Emily and Meredith. Then I share the results of the cross-case analysis for all three participants’ cognitive data. Next, I present the affective data for the participants in the following order: Aden, Emily, and Meredith. I then share results from the cross-case analysis for the three participants’ affective findings. Finally, I summarize the data collected during the study.

**Participants**

**Aden**

The following paragraphs are detailed examples and analysis of Aden’s experiences in the after-school literacy program related to the cognitive reading research
question. Included in the presentation of data are the aspects of the program, categories, and subcategories that emerged during the study.

**Aden’s vocabulary development.** Under the aspect of vocabulary development, two categories emerged as follows: Indicators of Lack of Vocabulary Understanding (unsuccessful) and Indicators of Vocabulary Understanding (successful).

Aden, although always eager to engage another in conversation, struggled to the greatest extent of the three participants with vocabulary development throughout the program. Since a large portion of our vocabulary time was spent in discussion of vocabulary words, I felt initially that Aden’s well-developed conversation skills would further his vocabulary development. Unfortunately, although he made progress throughout the study, vocabulary acquisition remained a weakness for Aden at the conclusion of the study. Even after he was exposed to words and interacted with them, he could not recall their meaning. Perhaps because English was not the primary language in his home environment, Aden often struggled to utilize the semantic and syntactical cues that vocabulary words in context provide the reader (FN-4/13-B; TS-4/14-B; TS-4/20-B; TS-5/11-M).

At the beginning of the study, Aden scored at the fourth grade instructional reading level on the word list assessment of *The Basic Reading Inventory: Pre-Primer Through Grade Twelve and Early Literacy Assessments* (Johns, 2001). At the end of the study, he scored at the fifth grade instructional/independent reading level on the word list. Aden’s word recognition became automatic after repeated exposure to words and discussion of the vocabulary. However, he continuously struggled with vocabulary
meaning as excerpts from my beginning and end of the study field notes (FN-4/14-B; FN-5/21-E) indicate. The first excerpt read as follows:

I showed Aden sight words and he recognized 31 of the 35 sight words from Unit 4 of the sixth grade reading text entitled, *Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Reading* (Flood, Hasbrouck, & Hoffman, 1995). Examples of vocabulary words that were used as sight words from unit four of the sixth grade reading text are as follows: *equipped, tollbooth, maiden, industrial,* and *formation.* Aden knew approximately 1/3 of the words’ meanings. Staff members of the after-school program had previously conducted the process three times with Aden with the aforementioned words. He still needed to read the word and its definition to me from the flashcards for 2/3 of the words. The fact that English is not the primary language in Aden’s home may impede his background knowledge and vocabulary acquisition.

A field note excerpt (FN-5/21-E) occurring at the conclusion of the study regarding Aden’s vocabulary development did not differ to a significant extent from the earlier field note excerpt. It read as follows:

[Staff member name] flashed Aden sight words and he recognized 30 of 35 sight words from the sixth grade reading text entitled, *Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Reading* (Flood et al., 1995). Examples of vocabulary words that were used as sight words from the sixth grade reading text are as follows: *coffins, appreciation, explosions, remote, hydrogen, triangles, explosions,* and *cellophane.* Aden knew
13 of the 35 words’ meanings. Staff of the after-school program previously discussed the words and played word games with Aden involving the words.

These excerpts from my field notes are typical representations of Aden’s struggle to add vocabulary word meanings to his schemata even after repeated exposure and involvement with the words. During word wall sessions we discussed multiple meanings of words, compared word similarities and differences, examined words in context, and created our own context for the words. Exposure to these research-based vocabulary acquisition strategies in this short time period did not appear to etch permanently the word meanings in Aden’s mind.

For example, in the beginning of the study, during a word wall session reviewing words that we had discussed several times, Aden did not recognize the word *philanthropist* or know its meaning. When I asked him what it meant, he said, “I never heard that.” During another word wall session when explaining why he again selected a word (*twittering*) we had previously discussed for his word wall, Aden shared, “And why did I pick it? Because I didn’t even know what it means” (TS-4/21-B). Transcripts (TS-4/28-M) show that Aden requested that the other participants explain to him what the word *unconscious* meant. After a thorough explanation, Aden questioned, “Do you have to be passed out to be unconscious?” He did not seem to understand the word after a detailed discussion of it. As the study progressed, Aden’s frustration with his inability to define words accurately became apparent. After stating that the meaning of *narrative* is “a submarine. No, I don’t know,” Aden said, “I’m not answering. Everybody always
picks me. They’re always picking me.” In addition, Aden shared incorrectly that a previously discussed word *nozzle* meant, “It’s like a cat, right?” (TS-5/5-M).

Although we spent significant time on vocabulary strategies such as context clue usage, concept definition mapping, and the Frayer Model (Billmeyer & Barton, 1998) during our word wall sessions, Aden did not appear to increase his awareness of vocabulary strategies as the program progressed. Both interviews and transcripts demonstrate Aden’s weakness in the area of vocabulary acquisition. During the initial individual interview of the study (II-4/4-B), when asked what he does when he encounters an unknown word, Aden said, “Break them apart by syllables.” Final program interviews (II-6/1-E, FG-6/2-E) did not indicate that Aden increased his repertoire of vocabulary strategies as demonstrated by his final individual interview (II-6/1-E) response of, “I break it into syllables. I break it apart and sound it out, and see if I can figure it out,” and his final focus group (FG-6/2-E) response of, “I break the words apart and try to spell it out (if I do not know the word).” Unfortunately, the collection of vocabulary-related strategies Aden was taught did not appear to help him decipher word meanings to a significant extent.

**Aden’s indicators of lack of vocabulary understanding.** Table 15 demonstrates incidences where Aden was unsuccessful at vocabulary acquisition or attempts to use discussion to make meaning to demonstrate or expand upon his own understanding or use it to aid others in meaning making. The paragraphs that follow the table detail examples of those subcategories in vocabulary acquisition. Examples of incidences of the subcategories are also found in the section entitled discussion to make meaning. He
made three general types of unsuccessful attempts: (a) repeating what his peers or I said during a discussion rather than formulating his own answer, (b) not being prepared to participate in a discussion, and (c) being off-task during a discussion. As Table 15 demonstrates, all three of these unconstructive behaviors decreased as the study evolved, and Aden participated in modeling and practice sessions regarding how to participate in a group discussion.
Table 15

**Numerical Occurrences of Sub-Categories Representing Indicators of Aden’s Unsuccessful Attempts at Discussion of Vocabulary and Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Category</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Total Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeated What Others Said</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Preparation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-task behavior</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repeating other’s answers. Aden often relied on the other students to help him during vocabulary word wall sessions. He would often wait for them to answer and then repeat their answers as his own. The other students often helped Aden when he did not know a word’s meaning or when he was not prepared to discuss a word. He frequently relied on the other students to clarify the meaning of unknown words for him. For example, the following conversation occurred between Aden and Meredith:

Meredith: *Tonic.*

Aden: What does *tonic* mean?

Meredith: It means, in the dictionary it says it means *poison*.

Aden: For real?

Meredith: Yes.

Aden: No, I’m serious. I didn’t know it was bad, *poison*.

Meredith: Ya, it says the definition was *poison*.

Again during session (TS-5/17-E) Aden based his comments regarding the meaning of the unknown vocabulary word on the other respondent’s answers. The following discussion occurred involving the vocabulary word *festival*:

Meredith: Okay, I’ll go next. My word is *festivals*. Everybody say it.

Students: *Festivals*.

Meredith: It’s like a party or get together or something like that.

Sophia: I think it is a big celebration for something or just for nothing.

Aden.
Aden: I think it means what all the guesses [were] because I think we all know this word. I think it means like parties and celebrations of what you are having.

Aden appeared to repeat more able readers’ answers during discussion time in order to make his peers or me believe he was an active participant. Table 15 demonstrates that this behavior decreased over the duration of the study. Aden’s comments alone account for 75% of the total times a participant in the study repeated other’s responses to formulate an answer.

Lack of preparation. One factor that may have influenced Aden’s difficulty with vocabulary acquisition was his resistance to investigate an unknown word’s meaning. For each word wall session, the students were responsible for selecting and being prepared to teach a word to their peers. He was resistant to use a dictionary or another source to find word meanings prior to each session (FN-4/13-B, FN-4/25-M). Moreover, Aden was often not prepared to teach his word. During one session (TS-4/12-B), he was not prepared to teach the word twittering, which he explained to his fellow students, meant “spinning.” Additionally, at the conclusion of that session (TS-4/12-B), Aden was told to select a word that he didn’t know from a piece of text to teach during the next word wall session. Although he miscued on several of the words in the assigned text, Aden responded, “All the words in there I know.” Later still during another session (TS-4/26-M), he was assigned to explain the term sprouting to his peers. He again was inaccurate and unprepared as evidenced in his explanation of sprouting as, “spreading it all over the place.” In a later session (TS-4/28-M), Aden selected the word ware to teach
during our word wall session. He inaccurately modeled its use in a sentence for his peers, “He wears my clothes.” During TS-5/17-E, Aden chose to teach the word *lively* during the word wall session. He was not prepared with knowledge of the word’s meaning. He said that *lively* means to live a long time. Later in the same session after in-depth discussion of the word *lively* with his peers, Aden still did not grasp the meaning of the word *lively* during a review of the word wall words as demonstrated by the following transcript excerpt.

Researcher: Which . . . word is it? To live something through?

Aden: Lively.

Meredith: Survive.

Aden’s lack of preparation often hindered his ability to increase his understanding of vocabulary during discussion time.

Aden selected the word *frothing* from a text excerpt to teach during the word wall session (TS-5/3-M). It was evident that he was not prepared when he pronounced a word as *foaming* in the following transcript excerpt.

Emily: Say your word.

Aden: It’s foaming. Foaming.

Sophia: No . . . it is not foaming. The word is *frothing*.

Meredith: It’s like soda, you shake it up, open it up, pshew. Then man it explodes. Aden, what’s your definition?

Emily: Yeah, Aden what is your definition?

Aden: Okay. Meredith was right. She was definitely right.
As the aforementioned example demonstrates and the *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2001) miscue analysis results indicate, both lack of preparation and inaccurate decoding of words were often issues that impeded Aden’s reading progress. Both his initial and final miscue results revealed an independent reading level score of grade 3, instructional score of grade 4, and frustration level of grade 5. For example, during a fluency exercise (TS-5/12-E), Aden was unable to decode the word *unbearable*. Aden inaccurately decoded the word he was to explain during the word wall session and was not prepared to teach it as demonstrated by the following excerpt (TS-5/12-E):

Aden: Me. I picked *shoot*.

Researcher: Shoot, spell it.

Aden: S-h-o-v-e-d

Researcher: That’s *shoved*.

Aden: Oh.

Both not taking the time to examine words carefully prior to word wall sessions and his struggle with decoding appeared to interfere with Aden’s ability to gain understanding of vocabulary meanings through discussion.

*Off-task behavior.* In addition to supplying him with answers, the other participants frequently had to remind Aden to get on task when he wasn’t paying attention during discussion (TS-5/17-E):

Sophia: Aden, since you aren’t paying attention.

Aden: Huh

Emily: He’s pulling up his socks.
Aden: Yeah, I’m pulling up my socks. I’m getting ready. Um, what was the word?

Aden’s off-task behaviors involved both him not paying attention to the discussion or being confused regarding the discussion topic. For example, Aden often experienced confusion adapting the correct syntactical form of the word to fit in a sentence. The following excerpt demonstrates his struggle to use the correct form of the word *benevolent* in a sentence:

Aden: What was it again?
Researcher: It means that you are fair and just.
Aden: My friends are very benevolence.
Researcher: *Benevolent.*

Furthermore in using the word *boyhood* in a sentence, Aden said, “I saw a lot of boyhoods.”

**Aden’s indicators of vocabulary understanding.** As the after-school program progressed, discussion appeared to help Aden in making meaning of vocabulary. In this section, I explain sub-categories that emerged regarding Aden’s success in solidifying his understanding of vocabulary through discussion of words with others. Table 16 and the paragraphs that follow it both quantify and detail, respectively, how discussing vocabulary and text with peers increased Aden’s engagement and motivation related to reading. Another subcategory, making connections, appeared to help Aden in making meaning when he was discussing vocabulary and text with others. As Aden successfully used discussion to aid others or receive aid in meaning making, I also found
subcategories, which I entitled leadership and collaboration/cooperation. Examples of behaviors that I defined as leadership involved the participant initiating lines of discussion, challenging another student’s stance on a topic, or explaining a concept.

Since both aspects of the program (vocabulary and discussion to make meaning) had the same subcategories, Table 16 houses tallies for both vocabulary and discussion to meaningful comments, leadership, and collaboration/cooperation. In the paragraphs that follow Table 16, I detail specific examples of Aden’s engagement, connections, meaningful comments, assuming a leadership role, and cooperating and collaborating with his peers while discussing vocabulary. Then in the discussion to make meaning section of the paper, I detail examples of Aden’s engagement, connections, meaningful comments, leadership, and collaborative behaviors during discussions to make meaning of text. Since vocabulary and discussion to make meaning are separate aspects of the program, I first examine the data for subcategories (engagement and motivation, connections, other strategies and meaningful comments) in the area of vocabulary acquisition, and then in a later section, I look at the same subcategories for discussion to make meaning make meaning related to the subcategories for discussion to make meaning.
Table 16

*Numerical Occurrences Representing Success Indicators of Aden’s Success at Using Discussion to Make Meaning of Vocabulary and Text*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>% of Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/Engagement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Reading Strategies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Comments</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/Cooperation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivation/engagement. Aden showed growth in the area of vocabulary development when he was engaged with the words and the text in which they appeared. He experienced increased engagement with words that he selected for word wall discussion and with vocabulary words that he connected with situations from his own life. Aden was engaged in vocabulary word discussion when he selected words or phrases such as *gobble*, *sploosh*, *blood was boiling*, and *coffin* to discuss. The majority of these words came from two books that he was highly motivated to read and discuss: *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980) and *Holes* (Sachar, 2001). For example, Aden made the following statements during a vocabulary discussion (TS-4/12-B):

Researcher: Okay, so what word did you pick, Aden?

Aden: It’s *sploosh*.

Researcher: What does it mean?

Aden: I think it means a type of slush or drink.

Researcher: How was it used in the sentence? Do you remember what the sentence said?

Aden: Well all it said was . . . Zero, do you want some Sploosh?

Sophia: Some kind of drink?

Aden: Caveman says what’s *Sploosh*, and they said try it.

Researcher: Why did you pick that word?

Aden: Because I think it is interesting.
Another instance of Aden’s improved engagement came when he selected the word *coffin* for study and led the group in a spirited discussion of the word as follows (TS-5/10-M):

Aden: It’s where dead people go.

Sophia: You make it sound so mean.

Aden: That’s what it says on the definition.

Emily: Where dead bodies are placed. In a box, it’s where dead bodies are placed; it’s in a box.

Meredith: What does a coffin look like?

Emily: It’s a box with a top . . . and you can get . . . any kind of *coffin* you want. You can get . . . grooves on it.

Aden: That’s a casket. I’m talking about caskets. They fold but they don’t . . . it’s a box, it folds, it doesn’t lock.

Another engaged discussion occurred surrounding the vocabulary phrase, *blood was boiling*, that Aden selected for discussion (TS-5/17-E):

Aden: It happened at Camp Green and in the holes they were digging.

Emily: Their *blood was boiling*. Can that really happen?

Aden: Like it’s just a figure of speech. Like when you get really, really mad.

Researcher: Yes.

Aden: So you need to get mad to have your *blood boil*.

Meredith: You get aggravated, how I get aggravated with my sister at times.
Like many boys his age, Aden was engaged with gruesome topics, text, and words. His engagement increased when he was reading or discussing topics that intrigued him.

*Connections.* Aden also experienced learning during the discussion of vocabulary words when he could connect the vocabulary words to examples from his own life. When discussing the word *unacceptable* with his peers (TS-5/5-M), Aden gave several examples of things that are unacceptable in his world to demonstrate the word’s meaning. He explained that the principal would find it *unacceptable* if he wore his cleats to school. He said, “I don’t think that would be accepted by Mrs. T. She’d yell down the hall, that’s not *acceptable* to wear cleats to school.” He also said that it is *unacceptable* to play real baseball or dodge ball in the school gym because there is not enough space and people may get hurt. In discussing the word *explosion*, Aden shared a scene from a television show he watched where his dream car, a Cadillac Escalade, exploded. He said, “*Explosion, my car exploded. My dream car blew up*” (TS-5/10-M).

Aden learned and practiced the reading strategies of text-to-text connections and text-to-person connections in order to make meaning of what he read while discussing it with others. These data are important because they demonstrate how Aden applied the reading strategy that he learned in the study to help him create meaning during discussions with others.

*Leadership.* At the end of the study Aden demonstrated incidences of leadership behavior. He explained the word *prairie dog* for his group in the following discussion (TS-5/12-E):

Meredith: It is a dog.
Emily: Yeah, there is a prairie dog.

Aden: It’s not a dog though.

Meredith: Ya [sic], it is.

Aden: No it is a type of animal, but it is not a dog. I looked it up and talked about it with [staff member name]. It’s a rodent like a squirrel.

Another example of Aden’s leadership was evident when he explained the vocabulary word *compound words* to the group. He said, “Did you guys know that, that some compound words can have a space between them? Some can be put together and some can be hyphenated and some are separate words” (TS-5/24-E). Aden’s leadership in vocabulary discussions increased as the study progressed.

*Collaboration/cooperation.* Toward the midpoint of the study, through discussion with the other participants, Aden was able to increase his understanding of unknown words. When Aden was not prepared to discuss his vocabulary word *sprout*, Emily helped him discover the word’s meaning (TS-4/26-M). After the group explained the word’s meaning to him, Aden shared his sentence, “I saw Emily’s plant *sprouted* overnight.” Aden also discovered the meaning of *down payment* from the following discussion with others (TS-5/28-E):

Researcher: If you place a *down payment* on something . . .

Meredith: You make some of the payment.

Researcher: Right, like when you place a down payment on your house.

Aden: What’s a down payment?
Meredith: When you are paying on a car . . . you could pay a little bit, like say $1000.00.

Researcher: I’m going on vacation this summer and my payment for my vacation is not due until May 30, but I had to put part of the payment of $200.00 down when I booked the vacation. Why do you think places want you to place a down payment?

Aden: They don’t want you to miss the date when it’s due.

Researcher: Okay. What happens if I decide I’m not going on vacation? What happens to my $200.00?

Aden: Bye-bye.

Researcher: Yes, you don’t get it back. That’s why they get you to make a down payment.

Aden: Money can’t grow on a tree.

Aden’s collaborative behavior of copying other participants’ responses appeared to lead him to improve his discussion responses as the study progressed. An example of simulating behavior that appeared to help Aden understand what was being discussed occurred in the following (TS-4/28-M):

Sophia: Abiding means to follow by something, wait that’s one of our vocabulary words. If you abide you are supporting or following along with.

Emily: I abide by my mom’s rules.

Aden: I abide by my father’s curfew. I still don’t know what abide means.
Sophia: It means to follow, to follow. She goes along with them.

Aden: Oh, I see. If I *abide* by my brother’s rules, I follow them.

Imitating other participants’ use of the word appeared to equip Aden with partial understanding of the word. Furthermore, after extensive discussion with his peers regarding the word, *conscientious*, Aden was able to define it using his own words. He said, “Okay. *Conscientious* means . . . if someone’s a *conscientious* student; they care about what they’re doing” (TS-5/18-E).

As the study progressed, he improved his ability to clarify information for other participants. Aden clarified the meaning of the word *hoax* for his group during the following conversation (TS-5/19-E):

Sophia: Does anybody think they know what the word *hoax* means?

Meredith: If it’s a *hoax*, it’s fake not real.

Sophia: So Meredith gave us a good explanation, who can add to it?

Emily: I think well this word I think it’s like a verb, but I think it’s a noun. ‘Cause a hoax is something you do on somebody, but then it’s a thing. No, it’s a verb.

Aden: My friends love to see people hoax their parents. It is . . . a trick or a prank.

The collaborative nature of peer discussion also seemed to help Aden improve his ability to identify parts of speech. When students would discuss word wall vocabulary, they often discussed the word’s part of speech during the discussion as a means of looking at grammar in context rather than isolated drills. When the study began, Aden
struggled to define words’ parts of speech (FN-4/11-B). As such, at the beginning of the study in discussing the word *gobble* in the book *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980), Aden said that *gobble* is a noun when it was used as a verb in the text. Through examples from and discussions with his peers, Aden seemed to grasp a better understanding of parts of speech. The following conversation occurred between the participants (TS-5/9-M):

Sophia: What part of speech is *abide*?

Aden: Verb

Sophia: You guys need to practice parts of speech.

Emily: Noun

Sophia: No it’s a verb. Abide is an action word.

Aden: I said verb.

In addition when Emily and Meredith insisted that the vocabulary word *trill* was an adjective, Aden said, “No, a noun, a thing. A rapid quivering musical sound is a thing” (TS-4/28-M). Aden demonstrated both leadership and collaborative/cooperative behaviors in order to aid or receive aid in making meaning of what he read during discussion of vocabulary with others. Through collaborating and cooperating with other participants during discussions, Aden both aided others and increased his awareness of vocabulary words.

**Discussion to make meaning.** Under the aspect of the program, Discussion to Make Meaning, two categories emerged. Aden was both successful and unsuccessful at utilizing discussion as instrument to demonstrate or expand his understanding and using it to aid others in meaning making. As such, I considered both his unsuccessful attempts
(Table 15) and successful attempts (Table 16) as sub-categories under the categories of Discussion to Make Meaning.

**Aden’s unsuccessful attempts at discussion to make meaning.** The majority of Aden’s unsuccessful attempts at utilizing discussion to expand his understanding of what he read and using discussion to aid others in meaning making occurred at the beginning of the study. Thus, I begin with the examples that indicate Aden was not successful with discussion as a tool for meaning making at the onset of the study. Then to demonstrate the evolution of his ability to use discussion to inform his own understanding and also help others make meaning, I share examples of his successful use of discussion as a tool for making meaning of text occurring from the midpoint to the end of the study. As the study evolved, Aden’s use of discussion as a tool to make meaning for him as well as others grew.

**Repeating others’ answers.** Aden often relied on what others said to formulate his responses in discussions about text and reading strategies. The following is a discussion that occurred during a review of reading strategies (FG-5/17-E) that demonstrates Aden repeating Sophia’s answer.

Researcher: What reading strategies do you know to help you become a better reader?

Sophia: I know how to visualize. Sometimes I mark and highlight things. I usually re-read if I am not in a hurry.

Aden: Same thing she said.

Researcher: What else? What other reading strategies do you know?
Aden: Marking and highlights.

Researcher: Anything else that you can think of?

Aden: We learned with Ms. M and she taught us that . . . um . . . what was . . . what was it you taught us?

Aden attempted to repeat or rely on others’ responses three times in the previous example instead of stating an answer of his own. Examples like these often appeared to be hindrances to Aden using discussion to create his own meaning throughout the study.

Off-task behavior. Aden made off-task comments such as the following statements throughout the study: “Um, I just forget” (FG-4/11-B); “The thing that I don’t get is where would Mr. Pendansky and Mr. Sir sleep at? Because I already know where the Warden sleeps at. So I don’t know” (T S, 4-12, B); “Wait what was the word again?” (TS8, 4-28, M); and “Um . . . in the next True Confession of Charlotte Doyle . . . what is her name?” Aden’s off-task comments did subside over the course of the study but still represent 50% of the off-task comments the three participants made throughout the study. Both off-task behaviors and repetition appeared to hinder Aden’s success at utilizing discussion as a tool for making meaning of text.

Success at discussion to make meaning of text. As the after-school program progressed, discussion appeared to help Aden in making meaning of text and reading strategies. In this section, I explain sub-categories that emerged regarding Aden’s success in solidifying his understanding of text. Table 16 and the following paragraphs both quantify and detail, respectively, how discussing text with peers appeared to increase Aden’s engagement and motivation related to reading. Another subcategory,
connections, appeared to aid Aden in making meaning when he was discussing text with others. And finally, Table 16 and the paragraphs that follow it put forward Aden’s comments about text that show his growth in discussing text as a vehicle for meaning making. In the data regarding Aden’s successful use of discussion, I also found subcategories, which I entitled leadership and collaboration/cooperation. Examples of behaviors that I defined as leadership involved the participant initiating lines of discussion, challenging another student’s stance on a topic or explaining a concept. Table 16 demonstrates documented examples of Aden’s leadership behavior and the number of times he showed behaviors related to collaboration/cooperation with the other participants in the study while using discussion as a tool for creating making. In the paragraphs that follow, I detail specific examples of Aden both assuming a leadership role and cooperating and collaborating with his peers.

Motivation/engagement. Aden, outgoing and a gifted conversationalist, loved interaction with others. He shared that he wished he could “talk about books” in his regular reading class instead of “doing worksheets all the time” (FN-5/16-E). Additionally he continuously inquired if we were having discussion time to talk about the books, *Holes* (Sachar, 2001) and *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980), throughout the study (FN-5/16-E; FN-5/25-E). Aden’s engagement with discussing text increased as the study progressed.

During the second focus group interview (FG-5/10-M), Aden demonstrated his engagement with *Holes* (Sachar, 1998). The following is an excerpt from the focus group interview.
Researcher: Okay, who else has an opinion on the book?

Aden: It’s awesome.

Researcher: Why? What do you like about it? What makes it awesome?

Aden: Um, I like all the characters like X-Ray, and Armpit and Magnet, and Zig-Zag and Caveman and Mr. Sir and Zero and Mr. Pendansky and Warden. And um, I like the shoes in the apartment. I like, Stanley’s, I like the shoes, um, the famous baseball player’s shoes.

Other examples of Aden’s engagement during the study are found in the section of the dissertation entitled, Affective Reading Development.

*Connections.* As evident in Table 16 making text-to-text connections or text-to-self connections seemed to help Aden avoid his reliance on copying others’ words to formulate responses during discussion. Aden made 44% of the total number of connections found in the data from the three participants. Such as in TS-4/28-M, Aden relied on text-to-text connections and refrained from repeating the answers stated by his peers during the following discussion session:

Meredith: I think it’s Mama Jean and she’s . . . wondering what Jimmy is doing, like he’s lying and then she’s going to see a man and . . . she may not want him there or doesn’t want be around him.

Sophia: I think Mama Jean’s going to come home and . . . she’ll be wondering why the door is unlocked and then she’ll find out that Jimmy’s Dad is there and she’ll be surprised and then she won’t
know who he is at first. She’ll tell him that and they’ll all have a big happy family.

Aden: I think Mama Jean will come home, and no I don’t think like the answers other people gave. . . . Maybe Mama Jean will come home and on the chair Jimmy was sitting on, is his Dad, but Mama Jean looks and doesn’t see Dad. . . . Maybe he is only there in Jimmy’s mind. Maybe he is seeing a ghost.

Researcher: So you think maybe he is seeing a ghost.

Aden: It is just because I read a lot of Unsolved Mysteries. . . . Sometimes the guy sees a person as a ghost, because really ghosts, they say those are real . . . One time (in Unsolved Mysteries) the ghost went away and the guy didn’t know where the ghost went away too, but it could be something like that.

Aden again used the reading strategy of connection to solidify his understanding during discussion of an excerpt from the story titled, Somewhere in the Darkness (Myers, 2003) during a discussion with Emily. In the discussion, Aden analyzed the actions of one character, Jimmy. Aden connected Jimmy’s actions to his own feelings in order to gain understanding about Jimmy as well as about the story. Aden said the following:

If I was Jimmy . . . if I was in his position, I would have felt scared because I saw this man that might be my father and I don’t know him or what he might do to me if he is mad that I found him after all these years.
Over time, Aden continuously improved his ability to build his understanding of text through use of discussion. At the conclusion of the program, when discussing *Holes* (Sachar, 2001), Aden related it to his own life in order to increase his understanding of the cameras that the prison guard used to spy on the prisoners. Aden said,

There’s this one time that I was going to my dad’s store and I was walking in and all of a sudden I see, I see this black ball on the top of the roof, on top of the ceiling. I didn’t know what it was . . . I went in the office to see the camera and all of a sudden my Dad can see me from there. Because I thought the camera, it was a TV. So if there is . . . hidden cameras in the book and hidden cameras in my dad’s store, then there are probably hidden cameras in our school. They’re watching us.

*Significant comments related to the text.* Aden progressed in his literacy development through discussion with others, making connections, and discussing self-selected text with which he was engaged. I could determine if students understood what they were reading and discussing by the comments that they made about the text, especially those that they offered with regard to the literary elements in the text. At the beginning of the study, Aden often struggled to explain his understanding of stories to others during discussion to make meaning time. His explanations were often brief and vague. For example, Aden explained on one occasion that he could tell by a character’s body language in pictures and description of their actions in text “what they are up to” while helping another student understand how to conduct a character analysis. As the study evolved, Aden’s ability to demonstrate his understanding of text during discussion
increased as demonstrated by the following examples. In TS-5/28-E, the following conversation occurred between Aden and Emily about an excerpt from *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003):

Emily: They can use . . . its setting. The old apartment makes it more scary.

Aden: You could use one of the things that we have been talking about like character traits or actions or important details to figure out the mood (of *Somewhere in the Darkness*). The way the father acts makes it creepy.

Furthermore, Table 16 offers the number of meaningful comments about text that Aden made at the beginning, middle, and end of the study that demonstrate that he understood what he read. Aden made 38% of the total meaningful comments that indicated understanding of text offered by the three participants.

**Leadership.** During the beginning of the study (see Table 16), Aden rarely took a prepared lead in discussion to make meaning sessions. He relied on the responses of others to formulate his answers. As the study progressed, I talked less and the students were encouraged to talk more. The initial sessions involved other teachers and me modeling how to function as a member of a group. It is evident in the increase of his responses related to leadership that Aden learned from the modeling and practice how to be an effective, contributing member of a discussion groups.

As the study evolved, Aden could be seen initiating some discussion topics. After a lesson on highlighting, Aden broached the topic of identifying important information in
a text that one did not own, and inspired a dialogue, informative and rich in ideas, with his peers (TS-5/5-M).

Aden:  Great . . . what do I do if I’m not allowed to write in my book? Like say I’m studying social studies, and I’m not allowed to highlight in my social studies book. What should I do?

Meredith:  You could write it down on a piece of paper.

Aden:  Okay, I could write it down on a piece of paper. Anything else?

Meredith:  You could memorize that word or information.

Sophia:  I could make note cards, too.

Researcher:  Students also write important information or questions on sticky notes as they read and stick them on the book. Or you can place a transparency over the page of your book and write on it with an overhead marker as you read or study. I’ll give each of you sticky notes and transparencies to try.

Aden often led group discussions through his comments and the insightful questions that he asked. The following evidence of Aden leading his discussion group, which also included a text-to-text connection, occurred during a conversation about an excerpt From the True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi (2001).

Aden:  I asked myself why does she think that not every 13-year-old girl is accused of murder. She was explaining that she was real mad at being accused of murder.
Researcher: So that’s her way of saying it’s not every girl [who experiences] being exposed to a murder accusation at thirteen. It’s not normal for a 13-year-old to be accused of murder, is it?

Aden: Before I read that part, I wondered who does she murder. I read how she dressed that way and I wondered why she dressed that way [with a bonnet and full-skirt].

Emily: Because her mom made her and she wanted to be . . . a lady.

Meredith: [Be]cause of the style of the time. It was the 1800s. See the pictures on page 128. That’s how girls had to dress underneath.

Aden: Pocahontas the second. I don’t know what they call it and she put it and it’s like a big round thing.

Researcher: That big skirt was a petticoat.

Aden: If you watch Pocahontas 2, she said she wears one under [her dress].

Aden also demonstrated leadership when he explained reading strategies to the other participants during reciprocal teaching times. For example in TS-5/14-M, Aden explained that visualizing is seeing pictures in one’s head about what they are reading. In session TS-5/12-M, Aden explained a difference to his group between Holes (2001) the movie and Holes (Sachar, 2001) the book by sharing “I think Caveman is covering for Zig-Zag. They didn’t say that in the movie.”

Collaboration and cooperation. In order to determine incidences of Aden’s ability to aid another participant or receive aid during discussion to make meaning time, I studied his ability to both collaborate and cooperate with the other participants. I used
the following types of behaviors Aden exhibited: helping others, affirming others, clarifying information for others, or receiving help in making meaning from other participants, as indicators of cooperation and collaboration. Aden, kindhearted and outspoken, often affirmed the other participants by saying things such as, “Go for it Emily; I know you can do it” (FN 4-13-B). His affable nature also led him to exhibit cooperative/collaborative behavior in helping the other participants when they did not understand information (FN-5/23-E; FN-5/27-E). Likewise, Aden received a great deal of support from the other participants such as the time (TS-4/21-B) he had difficulty sequencing plot events from a story and Meredith and Emily led him through the process step by step. Aden demonstrated behavior defined as cooperative or collaborative many times throughout the study (see Table 17). He grew from exhibiting 11 incidences at the beginning of the study to 37 incidences of cooperative/collaborative behavior at the end of the study. Several factors appeared to further and demonstrate Aden’s ability at discussion: (a) his degree of engagement with the task, (b) connecting the text or vocabulary to his own life, (c) the meaningful comments he made about the text, (d) leading other participants, and (e) collaboration with the other participants.

Aden’s reading strategy development. Under the aspect of the program of reading strategy development, the following categories emerged: Aden’s understanding of reading strategies and Aden’s reading strategy usage.

Aden’s understanding of reading strategies. At the beginning of the study, I interviewed the students to assess their knowledge and use of reading strategies. Aden did not possess understanding of the fix-up strategies necessary to clarify confusing text
when reading, nor did he have an understanding of how to define or use reading strategies in general. He felt reading strategies involved asking another person for help or decoding when one struggles to read text. When asked how he uses reading strategies, he offered, “I try to get help from somebody or I try to, you mean the words? You mean words? . . . I try to pronounce it or I try to get some help.” He further demonstrated his lack of understanding of reading strategy usage as the interview continued. The following text is an excerpt from my initial interview with Aden (II-4/4-B):

Researcher: Explain how you use reading strategies when you are reading and state which ones that you use.

Aden: Um . . . wait, what was it?

Researcher: Explain how you use reading strategies when you are reading and state which ones that you use.

Aden: The most I use is like how to pronounce words, break them apart, and . . .

Researcher: Anything else?

Aden: . . . try to understand the paragraphs, how the main idea . . .

Researcher: Any other ones you can think of?

Aden: Um . . .

Researcher: Any other reading strategies that you use when you’re reading?

Aden: What kinds are there? What other kinds are there?

Researcher: Those are the only ones you can think of right now?

Aden: Yeah.
Researcher: Okay. Well, we’re going to learn other ones.

As the study progressed, so did Aden’s knowledge of reading strategies, evidenced in the following comments. During one session (TS-4/8-B), Aden contended that in order to make predictions, “I use descriptions or details from a story and put them all together and make a prediction.” In another session (TS-4/14-B), Aden offered that visualizations are, “Making things in your head, like descriptions in your head.” He also shared that “you want to question what you’re reading constantly.” During session TS-4/28-M, Aden said that he practices the reading strategy of visualization in his independent reading. “Because it makes you think; it helps you understand more when you are reading.” After reading strategy instruction had occurred, Aden said that good readers reread and clarify when they do not understand what they are reading and that they may highlight or underline the important information (FG 5/10-M). He shared, “Every time I read a chapter, if I don’t really . . . understand it, I read it over and over again until I know it.” Aden also explained that inferencing is using all the clues around an idea to discover something that is not stated directly. He said that inferencing is “looking at the surroundings, the context.” Although he seemed to have a definite understanding of the definition of inferencing, he struggled to apply it when reading during the duration of the program. My field notes on several dates (FN-4/20-B, FN-5/2-M) read that Aden, like many struggling readers, could accurately answer literal questions but had difficulty answering questions when the answer was implied but not directly stated.
In the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), Aden shared that good readers reread and they “keep rereading until they get it” or as a last resort they ask for help from another person. He also explained that good readers make predictions and ask questions when they read. Likewise, in the final individual interview (II-6/1-E), Aden shared many reading strategies that he accurately defined and said he had been utilizing when reading independently. Aden said that he visualizes by “putting pictures in his mind when I’m reading,” and that he predicts by “guessing what’s gonna [sic] happen next.” He also shared that when he comes to something that he cannot understand when reading, he uses the reading strategies that he learned in the study such as using context clues, summarizing, clarifying, and rereading.

**Aden’s reading strategy usage.** Not only did Aden’s knowledge of reading strategies increase, but he applied strategies while reading as the study evolved. After instruction, Aden was able to use reading strategies during lessons or activities related to the strategy. For example, toward the midpoint of the program (TS-4/26-M), Aden was able to make inferences when playing a board game entitled, *Inferences* (2000). For instance, Aden inferred meaning after reading the following playing card, which read:

> My grandma makes cookies for us every Tuesday afternoon. When we walk in the house, I can smell the aroma of baking sugar. We go into the kitchen to give Grandma a big hug. Then she offers us a glass of milk and we eat the cookies as we tell her about our day at school.

Aden suggested that one could infer that Grandma gets to see her grandchildren once a week because “the paragraph says that the kids go there every Tuesday for cookies
after they are done with school.” Another illustration demonstrates Aden’s growth in reading strategy use under the direct instruction of the teacher. In a prediction lesson while reading *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003), Aden made the following prediction, “I think the man wants respect from Jimmy.”

As the program progressed, Aden grew in his ability to use other strategies during teacher instruction that were not the strategy of the instruction’s focus. When discussing *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003) with the group, Aden made the following prediction, “Jimmy is . . . an ordinary boy. Jimmy doesn’t have money. His father was in jail and Mama Jean is Jimmy’s mom” (TS-4/28-M). In a guided reading lesson on predicting, in Cisneros’s *Eleven* (1993), Aden utilized the reading strategy of questioning that we had discussed previously. Thinking aloud, Aden wondered why the character, Rachel, wished she were 102 when she was 11, and he also added in the discussion of the story, “I wondered why she said that.” He also predicted that the main character, Rachel, “is not happy about her birthday and being eleven” (TS-5/10-M).

Aden did consistently use one of the reading strategies that we had taught him during the program at times after the instruction had occurred. After the reciprocal teaching lesson on the strategy of making connections, Aden often used the strategy during small group time as mentioned in the discussion to make meaning and vocabulary sections of this study. For example, Aden made several self-to-text connections when processing the information in texts that he was reading and discussing with group members. For instance, when discussing *Holes* (Sachar, 2001), Aden said:
I wonder if I was over there [school locker room], I would look everywhere in the showers and see if there’s cameras in there. Instead of me taking a bath, I would waste my time looking for cameras. Does it make you wonder if there’s cameras anywhere in your life?

The aforementioned example also demonstrates Aden’s use of questioning, another strategy that we had practiced previously (TS-4/13-B).

On another occasion (TS-5/12-E), Aden was discussing the importance of making connections to what one is reading. He explained to the group that when he was in fifth grade, he read *Bridge to Terabithia* (Patterson, 1977) with his class. He explained how it made him think of the movie, *My Girl* (Zieff, 1991). He described his text-to-text connection by suggesting that both contexts had male and female characters that were friends, and one friend died in both settings. When reading an excerpt from *Tarantula* by Gail LaBonte (2001), Aden explained that the excerpt made him think of a story he heard in his religion class, and he made another text-to-text connection. He said:

To our religion, there’s this guy we’ll be learning about in social studies . . . named Mohammed. Long ago [*sic*] he was facing somebody and all of a sudden a spider came with him and the spider was next to him and the spider saved his life by drawing the web and . . . killing the . . . person that he’s fighting. So some spiders are dangerous, but some help us.

At the conclusion of the study, Aden connected family life with his 5-year-old brother to the relationship between main characters and brothers, Peter and Fudge, created by author Judy Blume in her book *Super Fudge* (1980). Aden said, “[my
younger] brother has a key to my door and he unlocked it one day and just started throwing stuff at me. It was so funny” (TS-5/26-E).

Aden developed a concrete understanding of how to use connections to support his comprehension throughout the study after direct instruction of the strategy occurred, applying it often when analyzing text. Unfortunately, I could not find extensive evidence in my transcripts or field notes of Aden’s independent use of any of the other numerous strategies the students learned during the program. However, Aden reported that he used the reading strategies that he was learning in the study during his school day in content area learning. He shared that he used the reading strategies that he learned in the program; such as questioning, when he was assigned to read the Weekly Reader in social studies class. He said that when reading his social studies or science textbooks, “If I didn’t really understand it, [I] go back and read it again and again” (FG-5/10, M). He also shared:

In social studies we were learning about the wars and we were learning about the empires and I was visualizing in my head pictures of what they looked like and how it was back then, how the clothes were and what their religions were.

In addition, Aden offered, “When I read magazines, I predict what’s going to happen, what’s going to happen in the future” (TS-4/21-B). He also said that during independent reading time, he was reading Cheaper by the Dozen (Gilbreth Jr. & Gilbreth-Carey, 1987) and “I visualized the part where mom is seeing the kids all over the place, but one is hanging by the doorway and another one is chasing another one and I visualize it like biting him.” In focus group three (FG-6/2-E), Aden said that he uses
reading strategies in math because math story problems, graphs, and diagrams are often difficult to comprehend. Aden’s knowledge and use of reading strategies grew significantly from his initial answer of, “What kinds are there?” in response to my question of “what reading strategies do you use?”

**Aden’s time spent reading.** Under time spent reading, the following categories emerged: Indicators that Aden Spent Time Reading, and Indicators that Aden did not Spend Time Reading.

**Indicators that Aden does not spend time reading.** Appropriately planned independent reading time was a necessary foundation for building students’ ability to discuss what they read. It was my goal to match students with books at their interest and independent reading levels. I wanted to increase their engagement and time spent reading because all three participants began the study indicating that they did not like reading nor did they read (FN-4/5-B). At the beginning of the program, when asked if he read at home, Aden answered, “I sometimes read at home and I only read probably for like a half hour. Like every day, like Monday, Wednesday, and Friday” (II, 4/4-B). However, his mom reported that he did not read for pleasure at home, and when he tried to read school texts, they were too difficult for him. She said that she was desperate for help to improve his reading as he had struggled with reading since kindergarten entrance (PC-4/5-B).

At the beginning of the study, Aden shared several indicators that expressed that he did not spend time reading. I felt the degree that a student visits both the public and school libraries indicates time spent reading. Thus, in participant initial and final interviews, I questioned each student regarding how often he or she visits the public
library and school library during a one month period. Aden contended, “I have a library card, and I don’t go to the school library that often. Yeah. I don’t have the time like I had last year.” I asked Aden what was the last book he had read, and he said, “one book named Tall Tree or um I forgot the one book” (II-4/4-B). When students could not name a specific text as one they recently read, I categorized the data as an indicator that they did not spend time reading. Furthermore, in the first focus group (FG-4/11-B), I asked Aden to name an author that he had read recently and enjoyed, and he replied, “Uh . . . J. R. Collin, oh I think that’s how they say it. Why, because he was an author for Harry Potter and some of the books that I read of Harry Potter when I did a report on them, I liked it.” Aden could not state the accurate author name of the Harry Potter series. He also was unable to provide details regarding the book’s plot.

During the second focus group interview (FG-5/10-M) at the study’s midpoint, Aden and I shared the following conversation regarding his inability to read at home:

Researcher: What makes you not enjoy reading at home or at school?
Aden: My brother, Noah, is all over the place and I can’t even concentrate.
Researcher: So he distracts you and makes you not enjoy reading.
Aden: Even if I close my door to read, he starts banging on it.

**Indicators that Aden spends time reading.** At the midpoint of the study, Aden said that he had recently begun visiting the public library with his older sister at least twice a month. He said that he had a library card and took books out when he visited, reading the books at home (II-5/9-M). In focus group interview two (5-10-M), Aden
discussed the information that he read in his sister’s magazines. The discussion transpired as follows:

Aden: I brought the magazine to read today that my sister brings to my house. You know the magazine *In Touch*.

Emily: No.

Aden: It told what’s happening on . . . how Brad and Jen broke up. Brad went to Angelina, and Jessica Simpson said it was over to Nick and now she’s going with some guy named Stick.

Emily: Nah, Nick and . . .

Aden: Nope. I read it in the magazine. I read the new issue today.

Researcher: So do you believe everything that you read in magazines, do you believe everything?

Aden: It’s really true.

Aden further shared, “I read during my break times during school and I read when I have time at home.” He also offered, “I read at . . . in a quiet place in my room, well it’s not really quiet, but that’s where I mostly read” (II-5/9-M). Aden’s thoughtful response regarding selecting appropriate books to read at the end of the study indicates that his time spent reading increased. Aden shared, “I read the summary, look at words, see if it is at my reading level, and pick out a book I might like to read when we go to the library.” He also said in focus group three (FG-6/2-E) that he enjoys independent reading time because it is quiet and allows him the opportunity to concentrate on what he reads, and that he enjoys the materials available in independent reading time because “they are
full of excitement and drama.” Furthermore, my field notes (FN-4/27-E) indicate that at the onset of the study, Aden’s independent reading time was spent looking at pictures in *Sports Illustrated* magazines. My transcripts and field notes from the end of the study (FN-5/18-E; TS-5/24-E) display Aden’s comments which praise and critique books he read such as those by Dahl and Coville and demonstrate he was actively reading these novels during independent reading time. In the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E) Aden shared that he has a library card and that he visits the library often. He also said that he has been taking books out of the school library. He offered that reading comedies makes him happy and that he likes to browse the sports, adventure, and mystery sections of both his school and public library to find reading materials. When asked when he reads, Aden responded, “Every day at school I read and when I have time at home, I read.”

**Summary**

Although Aden struggled with vocabulary acquisition of word meanings throughout the study, his word recognition skills improved by study’s end. Discussion was a powerful tool to assist Aden in making meaning of text, and his discussion abilities to gain understanding of text improved as the study progressed. Aden also increased his independent reading time once he was matched with books at his reading and interest level.
Emily

Emily’s vocabulary development. In the cognitive aspect of the program, vocabulary development, the categories emerged as follows: indicators of lack of vocabulary development and indicators of vocabulary development.

At times, during the initial phase of the study, Emily demonstrated partial understanding of vocabulary words. When asked what it meant that a character was beside himself, Emily said, “Like you’re a little bit wound up.” At the beginning of the study, my field notes (FN-4/5-B) read, “Emily’s explanations of vocabulary words were often brief and lacked complete understanding.” An additional excerpt in my field notes read (FN-4/5-B):

Emily knew 35 of the 35 vocabulary sight words from the sixth grade reading textbook that her school uses. She was able to identify the words quickly. This was also true when I tested her with the vocabulary identification part of the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008) administered at the beginning of the study. I asked her what she felt each sight word means. I urged her to substitute unknown words in a sentence with another word that she knows in order to help her figure out the unknown words. However, Emily only knew the meanings of approximately 1/2 of the 35 words. She had worked with aides sorting, and matching these words to their definitions on three previous occasions.

This excerpt from my field notes is indicative of Emily’s typical performance on word exercises at the beginning of the study.
Even as the study progressed, Emily’s partial understanding of vocabulary words led her to use the wrong form of vocabulary words in sentences. For example, in discussion of the vocabulary word *etiquette*, Emily said, “I am not a very *etiquette* person” (TS-5/5-M). During TS-5/17-E, Emily wrote, “My *reputation* is horrible towards school.” However, syntactical errors alone are not viewed as a major concern according to Johns (2001). At times, Emily experienced difficulty adding new words to her schema. For example, after several discussions centered around the word, *disoriented*, Emily said, “Because I didn’t know what that *disoriented* word on paper [means]” (TS-4/26-B).

However, by the end of the study, Emily’s ability to improve her understanding of vocabulary definitions improved immensely as she actively engaged in discussion with program aides and her word wall group. Included is an example from my field notes (FN-5/24-E) that demonstrates her growth in vocabulary knowledge:

I flashed Emily sight words and she knew 35 of the 35 sight words from the sixth grade reading text entitled, *Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Reading* (Flood et al., 1995). A sample of the vocabulary words that were used as sight words during this session were as follows: *quantities, magnetic, hard-boiled, tollbooth, environmental, submerged*. Emily knew approximately 28 of the 35 words’ definitions. This was her second time working with the words. Staff will repeat the process additional times until she knows the definition of each word. Emily told me what each word means according to her background knowledge. She needed to read six of the words’ definitions to me.
The majority of Emily’s unproductive attempts at utilizing discussion to understand vocabulary or what she read occurred early in the study. Thus, I begin with the numerical incidences, field notes, and transcript illustrations that demonstrate Emily was not always a successful participant in using discussion as a tool for making meaning of vocabulary or text at the beginning of the study. Then to reveal the growth in her ability to use discussion to inform her own understanding and also help others make meaning of text and vocabulary, I share examples of Emily’s successful use of discussion as a vehicle for meaning making of vocabulary and text occurring from the midpoint to the end of the study. As the study developed, Emily’s use of discussion as tool for understanding vocabulary and text grew.

**Indicators of lack of vocabulary development.** Table 17 and the paragraphs that follow it share occurrences where Emily was unsuccessful at using discussion to understand text or vocabulary words or use it to aid others in meaning making. The subcategories that I found in analyzing data under the major category are as follows: repeating what her peers said during a discussion, not being prepared to participate in a discussion, and being off task during discussion. Numerical incidences of Emily’s off-task behaviors, lack of preparation, and repeating what others said are found in Table 17. Examples of her off-task behaviors are found both in the vocabulary section that follows and the discussion to make meaning section.
Table 17

*Numerical Incidences of Sub-Categories Representing Indicators of Emily’s Unsuccessful Attempts at Discussion of Vocabulary and Text*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unsuccessful</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Total Responses Offered by Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeated What Others Said</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Off Topic Comments</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>39%</td>
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**Off-task behavior.** Unlike Aden, the frequency of Emily repeating what other participants said and failing to be prepared for discussions was insignificant. She repeated what other participants said two times at the beginning of the study and refrained from the behavior from that point. She was unprepared two times at the midpoint of the study and two times at the end of the study. However, Emily’s off-task comments were significant throughout the beginning and middle of the study. As Table 17 demonstrates, her unconstructive behavior of off-task comments decreased as the study progressed and Emily participated in practice sessions involving how to participate in a group discussion.

However, at the beginning of the study, the major deterrence to Emily performing as a productive member of the group, who used discussion as a vehicle to enhance her understanding of vocabulary and text, seemed to be her off-task behavior. As indicated by my field notes and transcriptions of small group discussions at the beginning and middle of the study, Emily was often off task during discussion sessions. Emily’s inappropriate or off-task behavior during small group time was referenced nine times in my field notes (FN-4/13-B, FN-4/25-M, and FN-5/2-M). I recorded that Emily needed constant reminders to stay on task during discussion time (FN-4/18-B). I documented the following statements in my field notes: “Emily participated but her comments were often off the topic of the group’s discussion. She has a tendency to dominate group discussions if not carefully monitored, and often becomes argumentative with her peers” (FN-4/-25-M). In addition, I met with Emily to discuss allowing other individuals to share their ideas without forcing suggestions upon them, and the importance of staying on the topic
of group discussion (FN-4/20-B; FN-5/11-M). Although our discussion goals were to make meaning of the story and help others to make meaning of what we read and vocabulary, my notes and transcripts indicate that Emily’s negative small group behavior occurred throughout the study and interfered with her learning (FN-4/13-B, FN-4/20-B, FN-4/25-M, and FN-5/2-M). When on task, she did not appear to exhibit many behaviors typical of a struggling reader. I felt throughout the study that her off-task behavior may have hindered her reading performance and masked her true reading potential.

For example, Emily was off task during the following vocabulary discussion (TS-4/18-M).

Emily: Um, I have another word for the word wall.
Researcher: Okay. You can do that one too, and you’ll teach it to us.
Emily: It means . . . I don’t have a darn clue what the word means. That’s the definition.

Another example of her off-task behavior during a vocabulary session occurred (TS-4/20-M). The following interaction occurred between Emily, Meredith, and me.

Emily: Mine is down sweater.
Meredith: What part of speech is it?
Emily: It’s a noun.
Researcher: It has down in front of it.
Emily: They are both nouns.
Meredith: Down is an adjective.
Researcher: Yes down describes the sweater so it is an adjective.
Meredith:  So what does it mean?

Emily:    It’s something weirdo, who cares?

Meredith: You need to be serious.

Emily initially had difficulties with vocabulary.  However, as the study progressed, improved discussion behavior; engaging text, making connections; leading and collaborating with others, and the meaningful comments she offered demonstrated Emily’s vocabulary acquisition through discussion.  Emily’s off-task comments such as “who cares” and “I don’t have a darn clue what the word means” dissipated as modeling and practice of appropriate group discussions took place.  The majority of her early off-task comments were attention seeking behaviors and were reflective of her often displayed “who cares” attitude.

**Indicators of vocabulary development.** Table 18 and the paragraphs that follow it feature subcategories that emerged regarding Emily’s successes at understanding vocabulary and text through discussion. The table and paragraphs feature the following subcategories; engagement and motivation, connections and meaningful statements regarding text. The table and paragraphs also describe subcategories, entitled leadership, and collaboration/cooperation. Although the table contains tallies regarding discussion of both vocabulary words and text, qualitative examples of the subcategories are found in the following paragraphs and the discussion to make meaning section.
Table 18

*Numerical Occurrences Representing Success Indicators of Emily’s Success at Using Discussion to Make Meaning of Vocabulary and Text*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Total Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Connections</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Reading Strategies</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/Cooperation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivation/engagement. When Emily was engaged with text, she often selected words from that text for word study. For example, Emily could not say enough good things about the book *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980; FN-4/27-M). Perhaps for this reason, she selected several of her word wall words from *The Twits*, such as the words *stamping* and *pretending*. When I asked her where and why she selected a word for word wall study, Emily offered, “Twits book, because it’s funny.”

Emily enjoyed word wall sessions and was always prepared to share a word that she selected from her environment. For example, Emily offered the following information regarding how she selected a word wall word (TS-4/28-M):

Researcher: *Nozzle*, where did you find that word?

Emily: In my science book.

During one session (TS-5/3-M) she offered, “I found a new word. *Paw Paw.*” Another example, characteristic of Emily’s motivation and engagement during word wall sessions, occurred as follows (TS-5/3-M):

Emily: . . . my turn to be the teacher, *diagonal*. Does anyone know what *diagonal* means? (Pauses to wait for participants to respond).

Emily: It’s a slant kind of figure or thing that attaches two points. How would you draw a *diagonal line* on the board?

Aden: I want to draw it. Here you go.

Connections. After being taught the reading strategy of making connections (S-4/6-B), Emily made connections quite often to help others and herself come to understand
many of the word wall vocabulary words. An example of Emily’s ability to connect vocabulary to her life is found in the discussion that follows (TS-4/28-M):

Researcher: Right. So it is anything you place under water. What are some things that you can *submerge*?

Sophia: Me . . . Ourselves.

Researcher: Okay, we can *submerge* you under water for a short time.

Emily: My dog, my cat.

Researcher: Ah . . . you are going to *submerge* your cat in water?

Emily: At my old house, that’s where I first met my brother’s girlfriend. She was at my house watching me because my mom and brother were out somewhere. I said, “Every Friday we always give my cat a bath” and she believed me. I said, “Somebody has to give the bath because my mom won’t let me.” She sat the cat in the bathtub; I turned the water on. She *submerged* the cat in the water, and the cat scratched the heck out of her.

Furthermore, Emily explained that her memory of the *Harry Potter* books by JK Rowling helped her remember and understand the word *tonic* when she and the other participants encountered the word in text (TS-4/26-M). In discussing the word *banister*, Emily said, “I have one. It’s a rail down the stairs that you can like hold onto if you need help getting up or something” (TS-4/28-M). In discussing *handkerchief*, Emily shared, “My grandfather has one of those. A *handkerchief* is a cloth like a Kleenex; it’s a cloth like thing that can be re-used.”
**Other strategies.** Emily also relied on the other vocabulary strategies taught in the program to decipher word meanings. Emily figured out that the word *spectacle* was the missing word from cloze sentences that I read the participants (TS-5/12-E). When I asked her how she figured that out, she said, “I used context clues, the rest of the words in the sentence, to help me know the word.” The aforementioned examples show that Emily learned new strategies during the course of the study; in her initial interview response regarding what she does when she encounters an unknown word: “I either ask my Mom or Dad or I use a dictionary and if it’s like a word I can’t figure out, I look in the dictionary.”

**Meaningful comments.** Emily offered meaningful comments about vocabulary words during discussions that demonstrated her vocabulary knowledge was developing. During one session (TS-5/3-M) Emily explained in describing the vocabulary word *hard boil* that “you need water and a pan and you need to have the stove on until the water boils.” She shared that “you do not *hard boil* anything but an egg.”

Emily also offered meaningful comments that helped her group understand the vocabulary word *coffee table* (TS-5/17-E), which also shows evidence of Emily making a connection. The discussion occurred as follows:

- **Meredith:** What’s a *coffee table* used for?
- **Aden:** Coffee
- **Emily:** You could put coffee on it but you could put like ashtrays or drinks on it and stuff like that; it’s something to hold your stuff on. And it
goes in the middle of your living room. . . . You could put like your
newspapers and magazines on a table in the middle of the room.

Aden: Your remote.
Sophia: I put my feet on it.
Students: Laugh
Emily: Does anyone else put their feet on it? I’m not allowed. My mom
yells at me.

**Leadership.** Emily took a leadership role in vocabulary discussion sessions as the
study evolved. After reading words in context, Emily seemed to understand words better
than other participants. When Aden was confused in a discussion, she explained to him
“wares are things that you have” (TS-4/28-M). After reading thwart in a sentence and
discussing it with her peers, Emily explained to Meredith, “Thwart means to stop
something or not continue something.”

Another example (TS-5/3-M) demonstrates Emily leading the group through a
discussion of the vocabulary word cellophane:

Emily: *Cellophane*, where do you use cellophane at?
Sophia: Kitchen
Emily: What part of speech is cellophane?
Aden: Noun.
Emily: You wrap food in it to protect it.
Aden: Then you put it in the refrigerator.
Emily also demonstrated her leadership qualities in a discussion when explaining parts of speech of vocabulary to Sophia. At the midpoint of the study (TS-5/5-M) when Sophia said that *appreciation* was a verb, Emily took the lead and disagreed, “Nope. If you *appreciate* someone it’s a verb, but *appreciation* is a noun.”

**Collaboration/cooperation.** Discussion of vocabulary words helped Emily’s understanding of words develop as demonstrated in the following examples. In discussing words with other participants, Emily often worked through her understanding of new words that she encountered during word wall sessions. For example, the following discussion occurred between Emily and Sophia as they together processed the meaning of the word *unacceptable* (TS-4/28-M):

Emily: Could I bring my dog to school?

Sophia: You’re allowed to bring him if it is for a project.

Emily: But it is *unacceptable* on a daily basis if I brought him.

Sophia: It’s a project; I want to see him. Bring him.

Emily: But it’s *unacceptable* for people to bring cigarettes to school. Even for a project.

Another example of Emily collaborating with the other participants to discover a word’s meaning occurred as follows (TS-5/3-M):

Emily: So what, what do now, what do you guys think *nowadays* means?

Sophia: Like today and yesterday?

Aden: Yesterday.
Emily: Like today or yesterday. Any like recent day around whatever the day it is.

Sophia: Could someone use it in a sentence?

Aden: It means now. Days now.

Emily: You don’t see those buggies, buggies and carts nowadays.

Meredith: My grandma says kids nowadays.

Researcher: What do they mean when they say these kids nowadays?

Emily: I think they are trying to say that they were different from how we are when they were kids.

Meredith: Like they were better or something.

Emily: There are more troublemakers than there used to be back then.

We’re bad because we say bad words more than they did.

Emily, an active, prepared participant in the word wall exercises, increased her performance from pre-test to post-test on the Basic Reading Inventory: Pre-primer Through Grade Twelve and Early Literacy Assessments (Johns, 2001) word list. Her independent reading level rose from the fifth grade level (pre-assessment) to the sixth grade level (post-assessment).

**Discussion to make meaning.** Under the aspect of the program, Discussion to Make Meaning, two categories emerged. Emily was both successful and unsuccessful at utilizing discussion as a vehicle to expand her understanding and using it to aid others in meaning making. As such, I considered both her unsuccessful attempts (Table 17) and
successful attempts (Table 18) as sub-categories under the category of Discussion to Make Meaning.

**Emily’s unsuccessful attempts at discussion to make meaning.**

*Off-task behavior.* Emily’s off-task behavior appeared to be a major barrier to her success as a productive member of the group who used discussion to build her understanding of text. Initially, constant reminders of appropriate group behavior did not seem to prevent Emily from interrupting others, arguing, or forcing her ideas upon others. For instance, the following is a discussion that followed our reading of an excerpt from *The Tarantula* by Gail LaBonte (2001). LaBonte communicated that, “People do not need to worry about tarantulas. They don’t usually attack animals larger than themselves. The bite of a tarantula is poisonous enough to kill insects, lizards, frogs, baby birds, and small rodents, but not humans” (p. 88). Although Emily read and discussed the aforementioned text, she argued with her discussion group. The following conversation occurred between Emily, Sophia, and Aden:

- **Sophia:** So everybody agrees with Aden that we don’t have to worry about tarantulas.
- **Aden:** She doesn’t agree [Emily]. She was like this [sic]; Tarantulas attack humans for no reason. That ain’t [sic] what the book says.
- **Emily:** Nah-ah
- **Aden:** You don’t either Emily.
Emily: That’s because all tarantulas attack for no reason. Why do you think people are so afraid of tarantulas? Many people have been bitten by tarantulas and they die.

Aden: Emily why don’t you read the book?

Emily: Why don’t you, Aden? Books ain’t [sic] wrong? Remember what Miss M. told us. You shouldn’t believe everything you read, but you do. If you believe it, I’ll bring in a tarantula and let it bite you.

Aden: No, thanks.

At times it was difficult to determine if instances such as these were Emily’s lack of understanding or a desire to be combative. At other times, her off-task comments demonstrated creative thinking (FN-4/25-M). When there was a lull in a group discussion regarding plot, Emily offered that we needed a class cricket. When the other students questioned what she meant, she responded, “When you are outside on your porch and no one says anything you hear crickets, so what we need is a cricket whenever like nobody says anything.” Extensive modeling, practice, and books on her reading level shaped Emily’s blunt, attention-seeking behavior into that of an out-spoken leader (FN-5/19-E).

Emily’s successful attempts at discussion. Although she was resistant and somewhat disruptive at first, discussing text helped Emily in making meaning of what she read as the study continued. Emily, always an active, attention-seeking, and outspoken participant, needed constructive modeling and practice to perform as a contributing rather than disruptive member of the group (FN-4/7-B, FN-4/13-B).
Motivation/engagement. Emily showed her engagement with the *Tarantula* by Gail LaBonte (2001) at the end of a discussion session (TS-5/17-E). She declared:

Hey . . . the thing I thought was interesting and surprising about the article was that they are not poisonous to humans. I thought they would be poisonous, kill humans and that they were giant. But they were small. I thought this article was interesting because I didn’t know that reading about spiders could be interesting.

Another example of Emily’s engagement with text was found in session TS-5/5-M when she was discussing a story, which she was highly engaged, *The Snake Scientist* by Sy Montgomery (2001). Her comments were as follows:

Emily: The story is amazing. The snakes are amazing. Isn’t there bunches of them?

Meredith: They are cold-blooded creatures. The story tells why snakes are amazing.

Emily: The story proves snakes are fascinating because there are so many there and they do so many things. That’s why all the people go see them. Would all these people go see them if they weren’t fascinated by them? They are fascinating because people can pick them up and they are harmless.

After reviewing Emily’s comments and reflecting on the quality of her responses, I noted her increased degree of engagement with text and her motivation to be a productive member of the group discussion that she demonstrated as the study evolved.
Connections. Offering connections during discussions appeared to help Emily make meaning of text. Toward the end of the program, Emily made a text-to-text connection in discussing visualization in Day’s *Good Dog, Carl* (1986) during a discussion with Aden. She first asked Aden what book *Good Dog, Carl* reminded him of as she explained that it reminded her of another children’s book that she had read. When Aden did not have an answer to her question, she explained to him that *Good Dog, Carl* is similar in plot to *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss, 1985), “because the babysitter (in *Cat in the Hat*) kept destroying the house and causing problems.” Emily also explained to Aden that the books are like the movie, *Home Alone* (Columbus, 1990). Emily’s growth in the ability to appropriately discuss books to gain meaning was evident at the conclusion of the study. Through modeling and practice of appropriate group work behavior, her true reading ability became evident (FN-5/23-E).

Meaningful comments about text. As their discussion abilities improved, so did the students’ meaningful opinions as they shared their feelings about the characters and events occurring in text that they were discussing. A lively discussion occurred regarding what Emily and the other participants did and did not enjoy about an event that transpired as they read *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980; TS-4/21-B):

Emily: I didn’t like that Mrs. Twit kept on having ugly thoughts about her so she became ugly. I didn’t like that.

Aden: Well so far I like Mr. Twit because he has hairy hair (laughter). But what I hate about his wife . . . because I think that is kind of mean what she did, put worms in the spaghetti and mixed it all up.
Meredith: I like how they play jokes on each [other].

She also demonstrated her understanding of text with the meaningful comments she read aloud, which she had written during a discussion session regarding *The Snake Scientist* by Sy Montgomery (2001). She wrote a post card to an imaginary friend, which demonstrated her understanding of text, telling them about Narcisse Park, the setting of *The Snake Scientist*. Emily shared:

Dear Vicky, It is amazing here in Narcisse. But there are so many snakes here, it is disgusting. The dens are full of snakes all the time. . . . The snakes are soft, friendly, and you can even pick them up even if they are wild. But always put them back where you find them. I hope you can visit here soon. Your friend, Emily. (TS-5/5-M)

**Leadership.** As the study progressed and her inappropriate behavior occurrences dissipated, Emily became a natural discussion leader (FN-5/25-E). As noted in Table 18, Emily increased her leadership behaviors throughout the midpoint and end of the study as she decreased her off-task behaviors. Emily learned from the modeling and practice of discussions how to be an effective, contributing member of discussion groups. For example, she initiated a discussion regarding how pictures in a story made her feel that inspired the other participants to share their thoughts and predictions as follows (TS-4/28-M):

Emily: I think these pictures make me feel cold. I feel like freezing and cold. Yeah, cold, freeze, freeze, cold!
Meredith: The pictures remind me of winter times. The pictures remind me of freezing cold air conditioning. I predict the story will be about a snowstorm.

Aden: I predict the story will be about sleet, ice, and snow.

Emily: These pictures make me feel sad because I can’t go outside.

Aden: These pictures remind me of when my cousins and I go outside.

Furthermore, when Emily was leading her group in a writing exercise of writing text for the picture book, *Good Dog, Carl* (Day, 1986), she encouraged Sophia by saying:

And now what happens? Look at what Carl crazy does next. Um, look Sophia.

And then, now this is the one you have to look at . . . to see what’s happening.

Look at where they are. Think, what is he going to do? Well start writing what’s happening.

She also led a discussion on inferencing. As she explained it to her group members during session TS-5/25-E, she offered:

This is what you do with your brain when you’re trying to figure these out, use the pictures, and use all the things, all the information they give you. Use the words . . . That’s . . . what you have to do when you’re reading and you’re making an inference. Sometimes [what] the author will do is just give you pictures to help you figure [it] out.

Collaboration/cooperation. As the after-school program progressed, the participants’ discussions of text developed. Their verbal exchanges became more thoughtful and lengthy. The following exchange occurred between Aden and Emily at
the end of the study as they engaged in an analysis of Walter Dean Myers’ character, Jimmy’s attempt to discover the identity of an unknown man in *Somewhere in the Darkness* (2003). Both participants worked together to accurately deduce that the unknown man is Jimmy’s father and the problem this finding may cause Jimmy. The following exchange occurred between Emily and Aden:

Aden: What do you think Jimmy is going to do next?
Emily: Well, I think um . . . like Jimmy’s going to try to remember his dad.
Aden: So you think the guy is his father?
Emily: Yeah and he is going to like try to remember his dad. I think the man is Jimmy’s father and I think he will like go to the man and ask him to act like a father. What do you think?
Aden: Um . . . I if I was Jimmy . . . if I was in his position, I would have felt scared because I saw this man that might be my father and I don’t know him or what he might do to me if he is mad that I found him after all these years.
Emily: So this book is making you feel scared?
Aden: Yeah if I was Jimmy.
Emily: Scared because you never know like never know someone or information about them and even if they are your father they still might hurt you.
Aden: Ya.
In order to improve their small group discussion skills and reader self-perception, I often encouraged the participants to lead an exercise or group discussion so that they would be able to do so in their regular classroom settings. As the program progressed, Emily’s collaborative skills developed as she was more likely to encourage others’ efforts at meaning making, although at times she often reverted back to her inappropriate group behavior. Emily often praised others’ abilities and reinforced when they were successful in meaning making. When Sophia wrote a summary of an excerpt from Spaghetti by Cynthia Rylant (2001), Emily said:

Good. Your summary was good, a lot of detail to it, but not too much. And you also used, what kind of words did she use a lot of then? Adjectives. That’s it, adjectives! Your English teacher would be so proud right now.

Emily’s reading strategy development. Under the aspect of the program, reading strategy development, the following categories emerged: Emily’s understanding of reading strategies and Emily’s reading strategies usage.

Emily’s understanding of reading strategies. At the beginning of the study, Emily was able to make vague references to her reading strategy usage, but often did not apply reading strategies in work samples or in oral reading exercises (FN-4/13-B). When questioned in the initial interview (II-4/4-B) regarding her knowledge of reading strategies, Emily responded:

Someone can become a fluent reader if they use context clues, they use their reading strategies, and if you miss a word in your brain you know that you missed it and just keep going without stopping and if you don’t understand it . . . go back.
On another occasion at the beginning of the study, Emily said (TS-4/6-B):

A fluent reader . . . usually stops at periods and commas, usually gets most of the words right and doesn’t really struggle a lot and . . . reads whatever they want to read. And someone can like becoming a fluent reader if they use context clues, they use their reading strategies, and they start stopping at periods and commas, and maybe read a little faster.

In both her initial interview (II-4/4-B) and the first focus group interview (FG-4/11-B), Emily said that good readers, including herself, always make Venn diagrams when they are done reading to compare things in the story. She repeatedly mentioned Venn diagrams at the beginning of the study as a reading strategy. She also said that good readers read almost every day and reread when they don’t understand something.

When questioned on her reading strategy use during the study’s midpoint, it was evident Emily’s definition of reading strategies expanded after instruction had occurred. However, she did not appear to have a well-developed repertoire of reading strategies that she could reference. Emily said that she asked her Mom, Dad, or a teacher if she is permitted to do so, or she looked in a dictionary if she encountered a word that she did not know. Regarding reading strategies, she offered (II-5/9-M):

I just like to read the whole book and then when I’m finished, I’ll make a Venn diagram and see if it’s different from somebody else and stuff like that to compare different characters in the stories. Sometimes I write a summary on the story so I remember what it’s about, and . . . sometimes I’ll like make a visualization . . . to
see what kind of, . . . a picture, what kind of scenery is in my mind. If I don’t understand what I just read, I go back and reread it.

In individual interview two (II-5/9-M), Emily said that she rereads and circles words, phrases, or sentences in her book that she does not understand. Emily discussed how she had used the reading strategy of inference in her social studies class. She said that she used the pictures and read between the lines to determine the author’s message, which was not directly stated (FG-5/10-M). Emily, Sophia, and I had the following conversation when reviewing reading strategies (TS-4/19-B):

Sophia: Um, mark or highlight.

Emily: It means that you mark or highlight important information in the story.

Researcher: Like what?

Emily: Um, topic sentence in a story. Like to get to know what the chapter’s about.

Researcher: Why is it important to do that?

Emily: So you know what the story is about and you get an idea of what the chapter is going to be about.

In focus group three (FG-6/2-E), Emily shared that during independent reading time, “I used a diagram the other day to compare the characters in the story.” In one session (TS-5/26-E), Emily was modeling how to use the reading strategies of prediction, reaction, and connection to her peers. She explained them by stating:
You could think about how it is going to end. What the next thing . . . that’s going to happen? And react and connect is what I was talking about. You try to connect it to your own life. You try to connect it to a book that you’ve read before or you try to connect it to your own world. What you’re hearing in the world.

**Reading strategy usage.** By the midpoint of the study, Emily and the other participants in the study were able to define or describe how to implement reading strategies. Emily was also able to implement reading strategy usage under direct observation and guidance of the teacher during reciprocal teaching exercises as the study progressed (FN-5/2-M). For example, during a discussion of the reading strategy, prediction, Emily made the following prediction while reading an excerpt from *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003): “I think the man wants to tell him why his father wasn’t there for him and why he went to jail.” In a lesson (TS-5/17-E) in which we practiced questioning before, during, and after reading, Emily offered, “What color is the tarantula’s hair and how many eyes does she have?” During another session (TS-4/19-B), the following discussion occurred between Emily and me:

**Researcher:** What does prediction mean?

**Emily:** Um, what do you think is going to happen?

**Researcher:** Ok.

**Emily:** I wonder . . . if Stanley’s scar on the back of his neck if it . . . pops or something or if something else happens to it like if the venom that was on his face gets into it and something happens to it?
In short text, Emily was able to apply the reading strategy of making inferences, but struggled with inferences in longer pieces of text (FN-5/11-M). Emily read the following text from a board game entitled Inferencing (2001):

Totem poles are wooden carvings that are a part of history. The carvings were made to show the relationship between groups of people or group of animals. Often carvers would use the poles to tell stories, but would keep the true meaning of the carvings to themselves.

After reading the text, Emily explained to her discussion to make meaning group that one can infer that totem poles were more than a piece of wood to ancient societies. They meant other things to people who lived long ago. Emily appeared to understand and apply inferencing without the explicit instruction from the teacher (FN-4/27-M). For example, Emily read the following excerpt from the game Inferencing (2001):

Leonardo Da Vinci was born in Italy in 1452. Besides being a great artist, he is well known for many of his inventions. He kept notes on all of his ideas. Among his notes were ideas for a parachute, a diving plane, and a flying machine similar to today’s helicopters.

Emily explained that from the reading she inferred that DaVinci was smarter than most people who lived in his time because he invented things that were not around yet. Then she gave evidence from the story to support her inference that the excerpt contained examples of his inventions, and his notes to show that he was talented in areas other than art.
She also was adept at implementing reading strategies during guided reading time in which we were not directly addressing reading strategy practice. Emily often demonstrated her use of strategies while in small group lessons with one of the after-school program teachers. In one session (TS-4/21-B), Emily said, “My question was, I was wondering why . . . the [author] thinks of himself as a mountain, and a tree and grass that shows kindness and love. I underlined the things I thought are important to answer that question.” During another session (TS-4/28-M), Emily said, “I predict the story will be about a snowstorm, and the house being covered by a blizzard. We predict the story will be about snow and ice.” She also said, “I have these questions about the pictures in the story. Why is it winter?” When discussing another piece of text, Emily said, “I could see myself as the boy in the story since he loved being in the forest. And then I drew a picture of what I think the boy looks like.” She used both the strategy of connection and visualization in one discussion response (TS-5/13-E).

When modeling reading strategies for the group, Emily said, “We can look at the pictures and . . . infer what the author is talking about.” In one session (TS-5/12-E), Emily made the inference that it was spring in the excerpt Eleven by Sandra Cisneros (1993):

[Be]cause . . . they’re going outside for recess and you don’t go out for recess when it is not . . . spring, and the sweater has been sitting there for twenty days so it could have been she was wearing it for the winter that was just over and it turned to spring.
I did not find a great deal of evidence to support that Emily was using reading strategies when reading independently. However, in focus group two (FG-5/10-E), Emily shared that when reading in social studies about Hinduism, she was confused so she used the clarification strategy of rereading to locate the information she needed. In focus group three (FG-6/2-E), Emily contended,

In my science class and in my reading class we get these Weekly Readers. I’ll underline the stuff that I think are important . . . I’ll read the questions first and then I’ll go back and underline things in the story and that’s how I do it with things I’ve learned here.

She also shared that she tried to make predictions, visualize the characters, and question as she read stories in reading class.

**Emily’s time spent reading.** Under the aspect of time spent reading, the following categories emerged: indicators that Emily does not spend time reading and indicators that Emily does spend time. Emily did not list reading as one of her hobbies in our initial interview (II-4/4-B). She said that she likes soccer and bowling. She said that she only reads on rainy days before she goes to bed. Initially, Emily said that the last book she read was three years prior to the study when she was in the third grade.

During a focus group interview that occurred during the middle of the study (FG-5/10-M), Emily shared reasons why she does not read at home; the following exchange occurred between Emily and Sophia:

Emily: My brother sits in my room and he’ll blast music while I’m reading.

When the book sucks [*sic*] I don’t mind not being able to read.
Sophia:    I hate it when that happens.

Emily:    And my brother likes to annoy me. He sits there and pokes me.

He’ll sit there and poke me until I stop reading.

Emily said that she would rather listen to music than read. In interview two (II-5/9-M) and throughout the study, Emily mentioned that she did not appreciate it when others purchased or recommended a book for her; she did not read them. The following is an example of her adversity to reading materials based on others’ gifts or suggestions.

Emily:    Yeah, I haven’t read *Are You There God? It’s Me Margaret* (Blume, 1970).

Researcher: That’s a good one. You would like it. You should read it.

Emily:    I have it at home because my cousin lent it to me. I never read it.

She also shared in interview two (II-5/9-M) that she doesn’t have a school library card. She claimed, “I lost mine and I never got a new one because I never take anything out from there. “

At the end of the study, she listed fewer reasons why she didn’t read at home. During our final focus group interview Emily said that she doesn’t read at home because (FF-6/2-E):

My brother sits there and annoys me the whole time. Then a phone call comes for me. My brother will sit there and pound on the door and I’m . . . reading. Leave me alone . . . he just keeps on pounding on my door so I can’t read. . . . Every Sunday . . . people around the whole neighborhood, we get together and the one
Sunday I had forgot about it. There I was reading and they kept pounding on my window so I stopped reading.

**Indicators that Emily spends time reading.** In our initial interview (II-4/4-B), Emily said that she goes to the public library twice a month and the school library once a month, borrowing books from both places. Also during the initial interview, she shared that the last book she read was the Babysitters Club books in the third grade. However, during the first focus group interview, Emily contradicted herself (FG-4/11-B):

I read a bunch of Junie B. Jones books and I . . . almost read the whole series and they . . . make me laugh a lot and I like the Bailey School Kids, all of them and they . . . like make me laugh, and they kind of make me . . . cry, ’cause some of the parts . . . are sad.

She further explained that she enjoys the Junie B. Jones collection by Barbara Park, because

They’re really funny and . . . they . . . have a babyish talk. Because it’s . . . two little kids and they call each other weird names and stuff and they make fun of other people . . . that and it’s . . . funny.

She said that she enjoyed the Bailey School Kids collection by Debbie Dadley and Marcia Thorton-Jones because they are adventurous and one cannot figure out the ending until reading the next book. According to their covers, Junie B. Jones books are intended for an audience of 4-8 year olds and typically enjoyed by young readers. The Bailey School Kids are intended for grades 2-4 according to the website of the books’ author, Marcia Thorton Jones (1999).
At the beginning of the program, Emily was often off task during independent reading time (FN-4/12-B; FN-4/18-B). After steps taken to improve her behavior, and matching her with books she enjoyed on her independent reading level, Emily increased her on-task time during independent reading (FN-4/27-M). She said that she loved reading *Teen Vogue, Cosmo Girls, Seventeen, Your Magazine*, and *Girls Life* both at home and during independent reading time. Emily shared that she enjoyed reading books by Judy Blume. She said, “She’s made books . . . *Fudge Mania* (1990) and I like most of her books and . . . most of her books are exciting and not boring” (FG-5/10-M). The following conversation occurred between Emily and me during an interview (II-5/9-M); it demonstrated that both her engagement and time spent reading were increasing as the study progressed.

Emily: I could be a better reader if I keep reading more and more.

Researcher: Ok, what do you read and when do you read?

Emily: I read a lot of fantasy and adventure books. And some that have no ending and then . . . at the end it has all the books together . . . I read the *School Kids* and they . . . don’t have the ends. I guess at the end of the series, they’re going to have a huge book and it is going to say all the endings to every single book they had.

Researcher: Oh. Really?

Emily: I guess. That’s what I saw in one of the books.

Researcher: So you are looking forward to getting that book?

Emily: Uh-huh. I haven’t read all of them yet, so I have to finish them.
She also shared in interview three (II-6/2-E) that she was starting to read a lot at home. She said that she and her friends read and discuss books that they are both reading over the phone, in a phone book club.

Emily enjoyed reading the book *The Twits* (1980) by Roald Dahl independently. Her comments describing Mrs. Twit demonstrated that she was on task during her independent reading. Emily said, “She’s annoying and doesn’t believe anything her husband says.” When asked how she felt about Mr. Twit, Emily responded, “Well, let’s see his house, he’s always sneaking around his house. His nickname is sticky fingers, that’s what he . . . seems like to me” (TS-5/24-E).” This is a definite improvement of time spent reading for Emily who at the beginning of the program indicated that she last read the *Babysitters Club* books in the third grade.

**Summary**

A major deterrent to Emily’s use of discussion to make meaning was her frequent off-task behavior. Through modeling and practice of appropriate group discussion, Emily improved her discussion abilities and relied on them as tools she used to make meaning of text and vocabulary. By the end of the study she was frequently a discussion leader and collaborated with her peers to enhance their comprehension of what they read. She also increased her interest and time spent reading.

**Meredith**

**Meredith’s vocabulary development.** Under the aspect of the program of vocabulary development, the categories emerged as follows: indicators of lack of vocabulary development and indicators of vocabulary development.
At the beginning of the study, Meredith’s sight word recognition was not as developed as the other two participants. For example, my field notes (FN-4/5-B) indicated the following information:

Meredith knew 20/35 sight words identified from unit four reading text, *Macmillan McGraw Hill* at the 6th grade level. I asked Meredith to tell me what she felt each of the sight words mean. Some words are repeated in the stack to give the student extra exposure to the word and build her confidence level in vocabulary acquisition. Meredith would often say the word correctly one time and miss it the next time that it was flashed. She knew approximately 1/2 the meanings of the 35 sight words. Then she read me the sight words and the definitions of the sight word on each card.

One factor that may have initially inhibited Meredith’s growth in vocabulary was her resistance to research the meaning of unknown vocabulary. During a word wall session, Meredith shared, “I hate looking things up in the dictionary” (TS-4/12-B). At the end of the study her sight word knowledge improved drastically as is apparent in the following excerpt from my field notes:

Meredith knew 32/35 sight words from the text, *Macmillan McGraw Hill* at the 6th grade level. She knew all but four of the words’ definitions. Then she read me the sight words and the definitions of the sight word on each card. (FN-5/26-E)

**Indicators of lack of vocabulary understanding.** Table 19 and the paragraphs that follow it demonstrate occurrences where Meredith was unsuccessful at attempts to use discussion to make meaning to increase her understanding of text or vocabulary. I
discovered one subcategory within her unsuccessful attempts at discussion to make meaning of vocabulary and text: being off-task during a discussion. Meredith had few incidences of repeating what others said or not being prepared during a discussion at the beginning of the study. Meredith’s ability to use discussion to inform her own understanding of text or vocabulary grew as she participated in group discussions.
Table 19

*Numerical Indicators of Sub-Categories Representing Meredith’s Unsuccessful Attempts at Discussion of Vocabulary and Text Understanding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeated What Others Said</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Prepared</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Task</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Off-task behavior. As displayed in Table 19, repeating what others said and not being prepared was not a significant concern for Meredith’s development in the area of discussion to make meaning of vocabulary. Her off-task comments were also minimal as the study progressed. An example representative of Meredith’s off task comments follows (TS-4/7-B):

Researcher: Okay Meredith, pick one.
Meredith: It is not my turn.
Researcher: Go ahead, Meredith.
Sophia: I think it is a hole for animals.
Researcher: If something burrows what does it mean?
Sophia: It’s digging.
Researcher: Meredith, do you have anything to add?
Meredith: Uh, I’m sorry. I didn’t hear; what did everyone else say?

Indicators of vocabulary understanding. Although Meredith displayed incidences of struggling early in the study with sight word identification and vocabulary meaning, interaction with the words and repeated exposure to them improved her ability to identify words correctly and accurately (FN-25-M). Meredith’s assessment data from the BRI (Johns, 2001) word list further supports her improvement in sight word acquisition as her initial BRI word list score of a fifth grade instructional level increased to a word list score of a sixth grade instructional level on the final assessment. Engaging text, making connections, and discussion helped Meredith improve her ability at
vocabulary acquisition. At the end of the study, Meredith’s sight word recognition also improved (FN-6/1-E).

Table 20 and the paragraphs that follow it share subcategories that emerged regarding Meredith’s success in increasing her understanding of text, vocabulary, and reading strategies through discussion with others. The subcategories are as follows: engagement and motivation, making connections, meaningful comments about text. I also found subcategories, which I entitled leadership and collaboration/cooperation. Table 20 demonstrates the number of times that Meredith demonstrated leadership behavior and the number of times that Meredith showed behaviors related to collaboration/cooperation with the other participants in the study while using discussion as a tool for making meaning. Examples of Meredith’s use of discussion to help her understand vocabulary words are found in the paragraphs immediately following Table 20. Examples of Meredith using discussion to understand text are found in the discussion to make meaning section of the study.
Table 20

*Success Indicators of Discussion To Expand or Demonstrate Meredith’s Understanding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage of total Responses of Three Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/Engagement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Reading Strategies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Comments Related to Text</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/Cooperation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Engaging text. Exploring words in text that she found engaging appeared to help Meredith acquire word meanings. For example, at the beginning of the program, *mystery* was one of the words on our word wall because it was one of the genres that the students studied in their sixth grade-reading curriculum. To my surprise, according to my field notes (FN-4/13-B), Meredith as well as the other participants were not aware of the meaning of the word, *mystery*, at the time of our discussion. However, at the end of the program, Meredith offered the following statements that demonstrated she had developed an understanding of the vocabulary word, *mystery*, during a discussion of the mood in an excerpt of *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003). This exchange occurred between Meredith and me in reference to an event during the story’s climax, as the character, Jimmy, is about to encounter a father he does not know or trust (TS-5/26-E):

**Researcher:** What’s the mood of the story now? Is it still scary?

**Meredith:** Um-uh, I think it’s mysterious. I think Jimmy will call 911. You never know. This might not be his Dad, and you don’t know what will happen next.

**Researcher:** Mysterious, that’s a good word.

**Meredith:** Thank you.

Connections. Meredith utilized connections and other reading strategies to help her make meaning of vocabulary words. At the beginning of the study Meredith did not make any connections but then readily used connections at the midpoint and end of the study to help her make meaning of text during discussions. The following is a group
discussion in which Meredith connected the vocabulary word *unconsciously* to her own life to help herself as well as others make meaning of the word.

Aden: You do it without thinking.

Emily: Sleeping. Blinking.

Meredith: My mom says I bite my nails *unconsciously*. I do that

*unconsciously*. I don’t think about it.

Sophia: I *unconsciously* blink my eyes.

When we were discussing the vocabulary word *survive*, Meredith connected it to the popular song *I Will Survive* (Perrin & Fekaris, 1978) to help the group understand the word’s meaning. She explained that in the song “the woman is making it through a bad break up. She is surviving” (TS-5/17-E).

*Other reading strategies*. Meredith also applied other strategies that she learned in the after-school program to expand her vocabulary acquisition skills. At the beginning of the study, Meredith offered a vague response as to what she does when she encounters a word that she does not know. She said, “I just take it piece by piece, I say three letters each time and I like put them together each time and I go on” (II-4/4-B). As the study progressed, it appeared that Meredith learned through instruction to rely on the context to decode unknown words. In a focus group interview (FG-4/11-B), when asked what someone should do when they come to a word that they do not know, Meredith responded, “They could use the context clues by looking around in the sentence or in the paragraph to figure out what the word might mean.” Meredith often used vocabulary words in context to demonstrate her understanding of a vocabulary word. In discussing
the word *unacceptable* (TS-4/28-M), Meredith said that it would be *unacceptable* to use a metal bat indoors to play softball because some girls throw the bat after they hit.

Meredith also often relied on the context to help her fellow group members figure out the meaning of an unknown word during discussion. For instance, when the participants were attempting to discover the meaning of the word *sploosh* in *Holes* (Sachar, 2001), the following conversation occurred (TS-4/12-B):

Sophia: Were they making him drink it or were they just drinking it freely?

Aden: They were just drinking it freely. Zero said, “It’s good.”

Meredith: Right here it says, “It was warm, bubbly, mushy nectar, sweet and tangy. It felt like heaven as it flowed over his dry mouth and down his parched throat. He thought it might have been some kind of fruit at sometime, perhaps peaches” (Sachar, 1998, p. 157).

Furthermore when asked to find a word in text to discuss, Meredith said:

I’ll pick the word *etiquette*. *Etiquette* means, I can tell from the sentence that I read, the context clues in the sentences that *etiquette* means that you act with having manners. If someone uses good *etiquette*, they say please and thank you.

When students were discussing the meaning of the word *benevolence* Meredith went to her sixth grade social studies book entitled, *Our World* (2003), to read the word in context to help students determine its meaning. She read, “Confucius taught that education develops ren or benevolence which he thought was the most important quality in a person” (p. 156; TS-5/17-M).
Meredith also developed word attack skills that enabled her to decode unknown vocabulary words. In the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), she explained to the other participants that to figure out an unknown word one does as follows: “if it has any prefixes or suffixes, you could take them off and look at the base word and see if you know that word.”

Meaningful comments. Meredith often offered meaningful comments that suggested she understood vocabulary as the discussion progressed. During one session (TS-5/17-E), Meredith offered the following meaningful comments during a discussion of the vocabulary word **reputation**:

Aden: Reputation. I think it means part of what you are doing.

Meredith: I’ll give you an example. I have a reputation for doing what I am supposed to do and being nice to my teacher. Reputation is how you act.

Sophia: It can also be how you act when you are trying to get people to think a certain way about you.

Meredith: So you can make a fake reputation too.

Emily: Some people don’t care about their reputation. They get bad grades and detentions and stuff.

Meredith also offered meaningful comments to help the students understand the word **foe** in the following discussion (TS-5/12-M):

Aden: My word is **foe**. What do you think it means? Take a guess.

Meredith: It means, Mr. Aden. I’m not your best friend.
Aden: What?
Meredith: Your *foe* is your enemy, a person you don’t like.
Emily: It’s a female horse or a deer.
Meredith: That’s a doe.

*Leadership.* Along with her word knowledge, Meredith’s leadership abilities grew through discussing vocabulary words with the other participants as demonstrated by the following excerpt (TS-4/28-M):

Researcher: Okay, you’re the teacher Meredith.
Meredith: Okay, the word.
Students: *Narrative*
Meredith: That’s good, what does it mean?
Aden: A person who is telling the story.
Meredith: No, that’s a *narrator*.
Aden: It’s like a submarine. No I don’t know. I’m thinking.
Emily: He doesn’t know. Say something.
Aden: Um, sh, um. I don’t know.
Meredith: Is that how you read it? Listen so you know.
Sophia: *Narrative* is an account, a tale or a story.
Meredith: It’s like a story. Remember when we like read our narratives at the beginning of the year? When you’re writing a story that you’re in it, that’s a *narrative*. Like when you tell a story about playing football,
what happened in your football game and you’re in it, Aden. That would be a narrative.

Meredith developed leadership skills throughout the program that aided her in clarifying the meaning of words for other participants as demonstrated in the following example (TS-5/3-M):

Meredith: A mall is a bazaar.
Sophia: Market places with shops or stalls.
Emily: Stalls is a toilet (laughter).
Researcher: No sections. I think that’s what they mean.
Aden: Oh (laughter).
Meredith: That’s why they’re called bathroom stalls because they are little sections.

During several discussions in the study, Meredith could be found explaining word meanings to the other participants. For example, she said, “Survive like if you’re surviving something you’re living through it. You’re like not dying” (TS-5/17-E). She also shared her understanding of the vocabulary word, lively, with the other participants in stating, “Um like maybe it means like opposite of like boring, like you’re lively, you’re up and jumping and you’re happy” (TS-5/17-E).

Cooperation/collaboration. Meredith was adept at clarifying confusing vocabulary for the other participants.

Researcher: What clarifications do you have? Anybody need anything clarified for that page?
Emily: I didn’t know what a parking meter was.
Meredith: It’s where you put a quarter in. It’s on a stick, not a stick.
Aden: It looks like a meter.
Meredith: You put so much money in for so many hours and after the hours are up you . . . They have those like down by the YMCA.
Researcher: Yes, you’re right, downtown (city name).
Emily: Now I know what they are.
Meredith: They give you like an hour.

Discussion to make meaning. Under the aspect of the program, discussion to make meaning, the following categories emerged: Meredith’s success at discussion to make meaning and Meredith’s lack of success at discussion to make meaning. Meredith was both successful and unsuccessful at utilizing discussion as an instrument to expand her understanding and using it to aid others in meaning making. Thus, I explored both her unsuccessful attempts (Table 19) and successful attempts (Table 20) as sub-categories under the categories of Discussion to Make Meaning.

Lack of success at discussion to make meaning.

Off task comments. The degree to which Meredith repeated what other participants said and was not prepared for discussions was insignificant. She repeated what other participants said one time at the beginning and one time at the end of the study and refrained from the behavior during the middle weeks of the study. She was unprepared three times during the course of the study. Meredith made several off-task comments that were noteworthy during the beginning weeks of the study. As Table 19
demonstrates, her unconstructive behavior or off-task comments decreased by the middle of the study and she participated in practice sessions involving how to function as a member of a group discussion. Examples of her off-task comments are as follows: “Wait, I don’t know what it means?” (TS-7-B); “So you can’t ride around with your lady friend or girlfriend, Aden” (TS-12-B); and interrupting group discussions with off topic subjects such as why she didn’t like her English teacher (TS-19-B).

**Success at discussion to make meaning.**

Motivation/engagement. Meredith shared her engagement when discussing the *Tarantula* by Gail LaBonte (2001):

> The article is interesting because I didn’t know spiders only eat [bite] insects, baby birds, frogs, and other small animals. And I thought that they attacked humans, but I guess they don’t. It helped me know about spiders and how they . . . live.

In her second interview (II-5/9 M) she said that she enjoys reading *Goosebumps* (Stein) because they are interesting fictional thrillers. She also said that she enjoys reading RL Stein because he writes a lot of mysteries and thrillers. She said that she feels the excitement and fear that the characters are experiencing when she reads his books.

**Connections.** Meredith made insightful connections to help her comprehend text. For example she put herself in the place of the character Jimmy in Walter Dean Myers’ *Somewhere in the Darkness* (2003). She said, “If I were Jimmy I would have been unsure before but now I would feel a little bit more comfortable because I would know that he was my father and stuff” (TS-4/28-M).
Meredith made the following self-to-text connection while discussing the story *The Three-Century Women* by Richard Peck (2001): “My grandma lived ‘til she was 116. She couldn’t walk. . . . It was my great, great, great grandmother. She couldn’t speak right like how we’re speaking right now. She was like laying down the whole time.” She again used the strategy of connection during a discussion of *Eleven* (Cisneros, 1993) at the end of the study. The following is the discussion that occurred between Meredith and me:

**Researcher:** Tell us what your picture is and why it represents the story.

**Meredith:** It’s of Mrs. Price holding up the ugly sweater. And my sentence, my first one is, I wouldn’t want to have Mrs. Price for a teacher. Because I have been embarrassed by teachers before like Mrs. Price. My first grade teacher yelled at me before when I was reading because I couldn’t say the words. I hated reading even more because of her.

**Meaningful comments.** Discussing text appeared to help Meredith make meaning of what she read. As the study progressed, Meredith’s use of discussion as tool to make meaning developed. Her meaningful comments during discussions showed that she was comprehending what she read and discussed. For example, she offered the following meaningful comments when I asked the participants how the mood in *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003) was changing (TS-4/28-M):

**Meredith:** It’s . . . less scary. Jimmy’s starting to get to know his father more, if that is his father, and . . . he is starting to trust him a little more and
not be sure about him but he is probably still wondering if that is really his father.

Sophia: I think that guy is still lying or is lying and he is like trying to like persuade Jimmy to think that he is Dad.

Aden: I think that . . . the man I mean I think that Jimmy is getting mad, well that’s what I think because . . . he might know that the man is still . . . lying or something because I think he’s lying about all that stuff going on in the past.

Meredith: I disagree, the mood is less serious than it was in the beginning because he is starting to believe and accept that is his father. You can tell by the characters’ talk and how they are acting; it’s less scary.

**Leadership.** During the course of the study, Meredith became skilled at aiding other participants in meaning making. The other participants in the study needed more guidance in functioning as members of a discussion group (FN-4/20-B). She emerged as a discussion leader much earlier in the study than the other two participants. Several examples are found throughout the study that demonstrates her ability to aid the other participants in meaning making. For example, she explained to the other participants, “If the story is like dark and gray it is probably a really sad story. The mood is how the story makes you feel” (TS-4/28-M).

Meredith was also skillful at clarifying confusing text for the other participants. Meredith often clarified information for Aden in discussions. She explained mood to him
through use of an example from *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003). Meredith painted a picture of the mood in *Somewhere in the Darkness* by saying,

Remember how we were kind of scared when we were reading the story because we didn’t know if the guy was really the boy’s dad, if he was going to take him, and then [it was] mysterious, who said that it was mysterious?

**Collaboration/Cooperation.** Meredith collaborated with the other participants in the following discussion to make meaning of *The Snake Scientist* by Sy Montgomery (2001).

Sophia: What are those things called? Why are they in such huge numbers?

They are found in Narcisse in huge numbers.

Meredith: It said they have sinks that hold large numbers of snakes. It says the unusual sinks provide shelter for large numbers of snakes.

Aden: That’s scary. The people can see them. The scientists go there and study them.

Meredith also collaborated with the other participants during discussion throughout the study. At the midpoint of the study, Meredith suggested that we compare the movie *Holes* (2001) to the book *Holes* (Sachar, 2001) that the students had read and listened to on tape. Meredith guided the other participants in the discussion as follows:

Meredith: They left out . . . where they have . . . the warden poke Armpit and push[ed] him into the . . . hole and they left out when . . . Stanley got hit in the book, *Holes.*
Aiden: They left out the part where . . . instead of Mr. Sir saying that . . . Caveman is covering for Zigzag, they didn’t say that in the movie.

Emily: In the movie she doesn’t, she doesn’t tell Stanley, the girl gets her things. She goes off and gets it herself.

Meredith: She tells him.

Aden: The nail polish stuff in the bag, she just tells him to go get the nail polish. She doesn’t tell him to get the bag.

Emily: She does tell him.

Meredith: No not the bag, just the nail polish.

Meredith’s facilitation of the aforementioned conversation led the group to make text-to-text connections.

**Meredith’s reading strategy development.** Under the aspect of the program of reading strategy development the following categories emerged: Understanding of Reading Strategies and Reading Strategy Usage.

**Understanding of reading strategies.** Meredith’s reading strategy knowledge grew as she participated in the study. Initially, Meredith possessed a vague understanding of reading strategies and what she does when she doesn’t understand what she is reading. She said:

I try to read the stuff around it and if I can’t figure it out, I’ll ask an adult or look for a dictionary. I look under the word and find what the meaning is. I . . . search for . . . the definitions if I have to find the meaning of something. I look around it and see if it tells me any clues. Look around everything, like around in the
sentence or in the paragraph to see if there’s any like clues to what it means. (II-4/4-B)

In addition the following conversation occurred between Meredith and me during individual interview one (II-4/4-B):

Researcher: Do you use reading strategies when you are reading?

Meredith: What do you mean by that?

Researcher: Do you know what reading strategies are? We are going to find out. We are going to work on them. Do you know any; can you think of any reading strategies?

Meredith: No, but I don’t think I do.

Researcher: Things that can help you figure out what you are reading. Have your teachers taught you any reading strategies or have you learned any reading strategies in the after-school program? Do you remember any of them?

Meredith: Uh, some of them, I think.

Researcher: So do you ever use any of them when you’re reading?

Meredith: No.

At the midpoint of the study, Meredith offered more in-depth information about the reading strategies that she employs when reading. She said when she struggles in reading text (II-5/9-M):

I read it over and if I still don’t understand it then I just . . . think about it for a minute and just try and . . . get it. I picture what I’m reading in my head . . .
sometimes I read out loud’ cause [sic] it kinda [sic] helps. I re-read and . . . try to understand it.

Meredith further explained her reading strategy knowledge in stating,

If I don’t understand . . . a word, I look at the stuff around it in the sentence or in the paragraph to see if there are any context clues and if I don’t figure it out I ask for help. (FG-5/10-M)

She also contended, “I’ll reread it until I get the idea of what they are trying to talk about,” and she said that she draws a picture in her head of what she is reading if it is difficult to understand material. In one session (TS-4/28-M), Meredith said, “You can visualize . . . people or if there is something, if it’s talking about like a certain type of color or thing, you can visualize that.” She also said that marking or highlighting helps readers draw attention to what they do not understand so that they can discuss it with another person. She shared that she uses all the words and word signs around a concept that are not stated to make an inference. She felt that visualization helps a lot of people to start to read better (II-6/1-E). In the final focus group discussion (FG-6/2-E), she shared that the reading strategies that she uses are prediction, visualization, questioning, highlighting, summarizing, rereading, and context clues. She suggested that good readers “reread and if they get stuck they’ll keep reading over the word or . . . they’ll look around it for the context clues or they’ll visualize and they’ll underline words or circle words and highlight.”

**Reading strategy usage.** Meredith was able to adequately and consistently utilize reading strategies during a lesson on a particular reading strategy. Under the
direction of the teacher during a guided reading lesson on the reading strategy of prediction, Meredith made the prediction, “I think the man wants to visit and see his family again,” in reference to the story, *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Myers, 2003). Furthermore, again under the direct teacher scaffolding of the reading strategy of prediction, Meredith made the prediction, “I think the man wants to get to be with Jimmy for just a little bit longer . . . he didn’t spend a lot of time with him when he was a kid.” Meredith also made the following prediction: “I think it’s going to be about Jimmy and . . . maybe he had . . . a lot of money and he won’t live with his father’s rules and his father could have been dead” (TS-4/28-M).

During TS-5/26-E when discussing *Holes* (Sachar, 1998), Meredith said that she had to reread a section of *Holes* when she was confused. The following is an excerpt from the discussion:

Meredith: Clarifying strategy. I needed to reread, slow down, and look at the pictures when I was confused about that part.

Researcher: Okay.

Meredith: And [I used a] prediction strategy. I wonder if Stanley will ever get rid of the curse.

Each night that the three students in the study attended the after-school program, they participated in a reading strategy large group lesson which was facilitated by one of the teachers in the program. I observed as a teacher taught a 30-minute reading strategy lesson on visualization. As I observed, I recorded field notes (FN-5/11-M) about the three students in the study: Aden, Emily, and Meredith. They had just finished reading
an excerpt from *The Three-Century Old Women*, by Richard Peck (2001). The teacher modeled for the class that as they were reading, she was visualizing grandma with her painted face, fuzzy pink bed jacket, and matching bow propped up in her hospital bed smiling wide eyed at the reporters. The class laughed at her words. Then the teacher sketched on the overhead the picture she previously described. She explained to the children that sometimes when reading she draws a picture in her mind or on paper of a scene in the book to help her understand or recall what she read. She explained to students that they too can use this reading strategy to help them improve their comprehension abilities. Then she asked for student volunteers to draw scenes from the story on the board. Meredith went to the board and drew the look on mother’s face when grandmother lied to the reporters by claiming to be on the Hindenburg when it exploded. She explained to the students in the group as she drew: “I am making mom look half mad and half shocked because that’s how my mom looks when she catches me in a lie.” Meredith connected her experience to that of the story’s character.

Meredith also developed skill at modeling reading strategies for the other participants after she learned them. The following quote involves Meredith explaining her thought processes when she sequences story events to the other participants (TS-5/26-E):

First step is, I . . . reread. Then I . . . read the bottom of all the things that need to be sequenced. Then I reread the story and underline the things from the bottom, making them match-up and I cross them off. Find all of them in the story. And then you should have all the steps, make sure you have all the steps. And then I
double check. I number them and I make sure I have all the numbers up here that I do down there. And then when I’m like sure that I have the correct number, then I number them down here. It . . . makes it so much easier to sequence them.

At the end of the study, Meredith tended to practice and discuss her reading strategy usage to a greater degree than the other students when we were not directly involved in a reading strategy experience. Meredith explained to the discussion group how she used the reading strategy of clarification when she did not understand text in an excerpt from *Eleven* by Cisneros (1993). Meredith explained her well-developed, insightful response as follows (TS-E):

> So that was my clarification. I read the next chapter after I re-read it and that helped me figure out what the author meant by how you can be eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one all at the same time. It means you are all those ages because of everything that happened to you when you was [sic] those ages stays with you for the rest of your life and makes you, you.

During one session (TS-4/14-B), Meredith shared how she used symbols to mark that she needed to clarify confusing information. Meredith offered:

> It says life is one big phase. So I put equal signs there to help me understand what the writer was talking about when they say life is one big phase. So I don’t understand it so I need to clarify it.

In TS-5/17-M, Meredith further demonstrated that she used reading strategies when reading independently. She wrote and shared the question during reading: “Why does he think of himself as a hero? Because I don’t think of him as a hero but I guess I am wrong
because everyone else does.” Meredith also generated questions while reading *Holes* (Sachar, 1998): “I wonder if the Warden, I wonder if um, Mr. Sir like gets sick or something. Or if the food tastes like really nasty.” She furthered questioned, “I’m curious about if the warden would get in trouble for poking Armpit?”

In focus group three (FG-6/2-E), Meredith said that she had been utilizing the strategies that we had learned in the after-school program during independent reading time. The following discussion occurred between Meredith and me:

Meredith: I used predict and I used mark and highlight when I was reading a book, *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Fine, 1987), which I just finished and books from *The Amazing Days of Abby Hayes* collection (Mazer) I used those. I used predict and question today when I was reading the story.

Researcher: What story were you reading?


Researcher: And what did you do when you predicted?

Meredith: I read one sentence, the first sentence they read, like the first sentence of every paragraph or like very page, and then I predict what’s gonna [sic] happen.

**Meredith’s time spent reading.** Under the aspect of the program, time spent reading, the following categories emerged: indicators that Meredith spends time reading and indicators that Meredith does not spend time reading.
Indicators that student does not spend time reading. Meredith shared in our initial interview (II-4/4-B) that, “I read a little bit at home, but I don’t like reading.” In the second focus group interview (FG-5/10-M), Meredith shared that it is difficult for her to read at home because she has so much to do, it is noisy, and she can’t read her homework because “it’s really too hard for me to read.” Although Meredith said that she did not read, the data that she shared indicated that she did spend time reading. Her comments that indicated she did not read were few.

Indicators that student spends time reading. Although Meredith stated at the onset of the study that she did not enjoy reading and felt she was a poor reader, she shared many comments that indicated that she did spend time reading as the after-school program study progressed. In her second interview (II-5/9-M), she said that she reads Goosebumps (Stein) because they are thrillers. She also said that she enjoys reading RL Stein because he writes a lot of mysteries. Meredith said, “I normally read … mysteries and things that are like not mysteries and fiction, nothing like really true stuff because I just like different like non-normal things.” During the second interview (II-5/9-M) of the study, Meredith shared that when she visits the school library, she looks on the computer for books in the mystery or thriller genre. Meredith claimed that she and her mom visited the library every other week and she took out books. She said that her mother is an avid reader. When I asked her when she reads in school she said, “like all day” and laughed. She clarified that she reads to complete schoolwork, and that she will read for pleasure during her free period but she usually works on homework during this time. She shared that she reads at home during the weekends and at the after-school program. She said
that she has recently started borrowing books from her English teacher. She said that she has a difficult time understanding the books in her teacher’s library. She contradicted statements from her initial interview (II-4/4-B) that she did not take books out of the school library. Meredith claimed that, “I do have a school library card and I do take them out, some books out.” She said that she takes a book out from the school library every two weeks and reads it. She said that she goes to the public library almost every day. She said that she examines both the front and back covers of books to decide if she wants to read them. She offered, “Well, like when I judge it by its cover, I get the book and I take a glimpse at it and if I see something it says in there that’s real good, it makes me want to read it.”

During the second focus group interview (FG-5/10-M), Meredith shared that she enjoys reading, “whenever I have like a quiet place I like to read or . . . if . . . my mom has to take me to . . . her work then I just go and sit down and read.” She also shared information about what she is reading as follows:

Meredith: My mom makes me read. See I’m a Christian, so I like read this Christian book because I think I have problem with being myself so my mom makes me read this book of succeeding at being yourself.

Researcher: That sounds like a good book. What is it about?

Meredith: How to love yourself and how like you shouldn’t like think down on stuff no matter how you look because that’s that way God wanted you to be.

Researcher: That sounds like a good one to me. Do you ever read the Bible?
Meredith: Yes, I do. I read the Bible and my mom makes confessions for me.

Researcher: Can you think of other books that you read?

Meredith: Right now I am just working on how to succeed at (being) myself.

In the final interview (II-6/1-E) of the study, in regards to her reading habits, Meredith was able to list a specific book and author when asked to name her favorite book. She also made a self-to-text connection when explaining it. She liked The Amazing Days of Abby Hayes collection (Miner) “because it’s about a girl that collects calendars and she’s like sporty and she has two twin sisters and . . . reminds me of my family.” She said that she has all of the author’s books. She said that they are for grades five and up. Meredith said that she reads the back of the book and takes others’ suggestions to determine what she will read next. She indicated that she likes to read horror books and fiction and non-fiction.

And in typical Meredith fashion, she blatantly shared that, “It’s important to read . . . every day and you might as well find a way to like it if you’re gonna [sic] have to do it, to get better in school.”

Summary

Meredith’s sight word acquisition was weak at the beginning of the study, but improved as the study progressed. She was more reserved and timid than the other participants so it took her longer to feel comfortable in group sessions. However throughout the study she displayed many incidences of leadership and collaboration in making meaning of what she read with her fellow participants during small group discussion.
Cross-Case Analysis of Cognitive Data

Vocabulary

The purpose of the cross case analysis is to compare the experiences of the three struggling readers in the study: Aden, Emily, and Meredith. Both Emily and Meredith improved in the area of vocabulary development to a greater degree than Aden. Aden struggled with the phonological, syntactical, and semantic cues found in the English language to a greater extent than the other two participants. One factor that may have attributed to Aden’s struggle with the English language was that his family spoke both Arabic and English in their home, relying on the Arabic language as a means of communication (PC-4/4-B). Emily also struggled with syntactical awareness but to a much lesser degree than Aden.

At the beginning of the study, it seemed Meredith struggled with sight word acquisition (being able to say the word) and word meaning, but as the study progressed, she appeared to possess a greater degree of awareness of vocabulary meaning (knowing the word’s definition) during our discussions than the other two participants. From the beginning of the study, Emily had automatic vocabulary identification and partial understanding of many vocabulary words but did not have full understanding of their meaning. Aden struggled with both sight words and vocabulary meaning throughout the study.

Several subcategories that I found deterred the participants’ vocabulary acquisition to varying degrees as follows: off-task behaviors, repeating others answers, and lack of preparation for vocabulary discussion sessions. At the beginning of the study,
all three participants displayed a significant number of off-task behaviors, but Meredith and Emily had few incidences of off-task behaviors by the end of the study where as Aden continued to make them throughout the study. He contributed 50% of the off-task behaviors found in the study data.

Another significant problem for Aden was that he was not prepared for word wall sessions; Emily and Meredith were prepared most of the time by the study’s midpoint. An additional factor that attributed to Aden’s lack of success at vocabulary acquisition, which did not appear to considerably deter the other participants’ vocabulary acquisition, was that Aden often repeated other participants’ answers to make it appear that he was a contributing member of the discussion. He repeated what others said 12 times during group discussions. He also struggled with applying the vocabulary strategies that were taught in the program. Once Aden improved his degree of preparation and practiced appropriate group work behavior, his discussion behavior improved.

Patterns also emerged pertaining to all three participants that appeared to help them assimilate new words to their vocabularies and helped me ascertain their vocabulary knowledge. The subcategories are as follows: the participants’ levels of engagement with the text in which the word occurred, the personal connections they were able to make to the word, and the meaningful comments that they made about vocabulary words. Meredith made connections to the greatest extent of the three participants. Both Aden and Meredith also offered rich connections to their own lives when discussing vocabulary, which appeared to help them create meaning of the words. Students were also interested in discussing vocabulary from texts they found engaging. Being able to
select their own words to discuss seemed to increase Emily’s and Meredith’s engagement with vocabulary study but did not influence Aden’s interest with the activity.

All three participants’ leadership and collaboration skills in discussion increased as the study progressed. Discussing the words with other participants helped all three participants add vocabulary words to their schemata. When Emily’s behavior and discussion skills improved, her ability to expand her vocabulary through discussion improved. Although Aden appeared to be engaged with discussing words, especially grisly words, discussion did not appear to be as beneficial to him in acquiring and keeping word meanings as it was for Emily and Meredith. Vocabulary was still a weakness for Aden at the end of the program but did not appear to be for Emily or Meredith.

Overall, Aden’s struggle with vocabulary was much more intensive and deep rooted than Emily’s and Meredith’s struggle with sight word and vocabulary acquisition. Discussing vocabulary words appeared to help Emily and Meredith make meaning of vocabulary words and add sight words to their vocabularies. Although Aden was engaged with discussing vocabulary words, discussion did not appear to support his sight word or vocabulary acquisition to a great degree.

**Discussion to Make Meaning**

Participant abilities involving collaboration and cooperation during discussion improved in all three participants during this study. At the beginning of the study, I learned that Aden, Emily, and Meredith did not know how to participate fully in book discussions. They needed extensive modeling and practice to become active participants
in discussions. Through observation, modeling, and practicing appropriate discussion behaviors, the participants’ discussion skills advanced. The students had a chance to shine as both discussion leaders and participants, something struggling readers often do not experience in the regular classroom.

The students struggled at the beginning of the study with varying degrees of inappropriate group behaviors, all of which improved as the study progressed. For example, the students differed in the types of off-task comments they made. Aden’s off-task comments usually represented his general confusion. Emily’s off-task behaviors seemed to be attention seeking in nature. Being off task was a major hindrance to Emily’s early success as a discussion member. Emily’s behavior improved once modeling and instruction occurred and she had the opportunity to be an active participant in the discussions. Once her off-task behavior lessened, she did not possess many of the qualities of a struggling reader, and she was much better at discussion. She became a natural leader during discussions. Meredith’s off-task behaviors were few and seemed to be a combination of her early aloof behavior and periodic but rare moments of confusion. As the study evolved, Meredith’s comments were often more mature and developed than the other two participants. She emerged much earlier in the study as a discussion leader than the other two participants.

Another major deterrent to Aden’s success as a discussion participant was his reliance on repeating other’s answers as his responses. The other two participants rarely engaged in this behavior. However, his reliance on other participants also led to a positive outcome because he received a great deal of support in discussions from Emily
and Meredith when he was often confused. This fostered all three participants’ cooperative skills. Aden, an outgoing conversationalist, loved to discuss books such as *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980) and *Holes* (Sachar, 2001). He led the group during these discussions with his insightful questions.

Meredith, Emily, and Aden were interested in discussing similar types of text. They each seemed to enjoy mysteries, dark humor, and scary stories. Emily and Aden were more interested in reading sports-related materials than Meredith. Emily surpassed the other two participants at explaining concepts at the end of the study. She was also proficient, like Aden, at initiating lines of discussion. All three participants readily made connections to their own lives when discussing text. It seemed to take Meredith, shy and reserved, longer initially to make connections when discussing texts than it did the other two participants. All three students enjoyed sharing their opinions of text and the characters found in the stories we discussed. Their comments became more lengthy and involved as the study progressed.

**Reading Strategy Development**

At the onset of the study, the three participants could not define or suggest many reading strategies they used. Aden, especially, had a very difficult time at the beginning of the study defining reading strategies. He defined them as asking another for help, sounding things out, or looking in the dictionary. At one point in the beginning of the study he said, “What are they?” when questioned about his reading strategy usage. At the onset of the study, Meredith also could not name more than two strategies nor could she define specific strategies. She only mentioned context clues and asking others for help as
a tool for clarification. Emily described the two aforementioned tools as a means of clarification during reading and also repeatedly referred to a Venn diagram as a reading strategy she used throughout the study. She made vague references to reading strategies, but did not apply them at the beginning of the study. She also shared that she rereads and uses context clues.

All three study participants increased their leadership abilities and reading strategy understanding as they helped one another understand strategies, taught the strategies through reciprocal teaching, and clarified information for one another. At the midpoint of the study, Meredith mentioned and defined several strategies saying that she used them. Meredith was the most proficient at explaining and teaching strategies to the other participants at the study’s midpoint. She was competent at using strategies under the direct instruction of teacher, especially visualization. During the middle of the study, Emily mentioned and defined several reading strategies that she used. She talked about using visualizing, rereading, inferencing, marking, and highlighting. It took her until the end of the study to be able to adequately engage in the reciprocal teaching process and model the reading strategies for the other participants. As the study progressed, Aden could define and list strategies. He could use them during group discussion on the specific strategy. He would use strategies during instruction that were taught in a previous session strategy of instruction. However, he struggled to explain reading strategies to the other participants during reciprocal teaching time.

At the conclusion of the study, all three participants increased their reading strategy knowledge and could appropriately explain the reading strategies that they
learned and used. For example, at the end of the study, Meredith listed and appropriately described five strategies that she uses. In addition, the participants shared their vastly improved knowledge of reading strategies in focus group three as follows (FG-6/2-E):

Meredith: Some reading strategies are . . . predict, visualize, ask questions, highlight, mark . . . summarize, re-read, use context clues.

Aden: I use visualize, when I use it, I use pictures in my head to see. That’s what I do most often and sometimes . . . I mark and highlight too.

Emily: I use predict. I mark and highlight the important things.

By the end of the study, Emily could model reading strategies such as connection and reaction for her peers. She readily made inferences free of the teacher direction. She also used questioning and connecting often to make meaning of text. However, I did not find a great deal of evidence that supports that she or Aden used many of the reading strategies taught in the program in their responses as they read independently. Aden was especially good at making connections and questioning after those strategies were taught, and he would offer connections or questions frequently as we were discussing text. I did not find Aden’s extensive use of other reading strategies independently though. He said that he predicts, visualizes, questions, and rereads during the school day in his content area subjects, and he was able to provide examples. Meredith spoke more frequently about using reading strategies when reading independently than Emily and Aden. Meredith’s reading strategy usage was more developed than the other participants. She was able to use many of the strategies taught in the program such as connections, clarification, and visualization. She was much better at clarifying and rereading when
she did not understand than the other participants were. The reading strategy that the three participants utilized most frequently during discussions after it was taught was connections as they read and discussed text.

**Time spent reading.** Unfortunately, all three participants said that they did not enjoy reading at the beginning of the study. Emily, in particular, insisted that she did not enjoy reading, when questioned at the study’s onset. She said that she last read a book three years prior to the beginning of the study. However, Emily often contradicted herself. One got the impression that she wanted people to believe that she did not read but that she really did occasionally, although it appeared that she read books for much younger children. Aden indicated he read for fun at the beginning of program, but his mom shared that he did not spend time reading. She said school reading was too difficult for him. In another early interview, he said that it was challenging for him to read at home due to frequent interruptions. He could not state the name or title of an author or book that he had read recently at the beginning of the study. Meredith shared that she did not like reading but offered comments that suggested she really was an individual who periodically would pleasure read.

At the beginning of the study, Aden said that he did not visit the school or public library regularly. However, at the midpoint of the study, Aden suggested that he had begun to visit the library with his sister, and he brought materials to the study from the library to read during independent reading time. Meredith said at the beginning of the program that she did not like reading and did not spend time at the library. Meredith said that she was visiting the library regularly by the study’s end. At both the beginning and
midpoint of the study, Emily said that she did not have a library card because she did not use it. She did not appreciate people telling her what to read or recommending books to her. But then in the final focus group interview when the other participants were sharing their reading experiences, she said that she does attend the library and she reads *Junie B. Jones* (Park & Brunkus) and *Bailey Kids* (Dadley & Jones) books, which are intended for younger readers. By the end of the study, all three participants claimed to have increased their library visits and enjoyment with the library and reading for pleasure.

At the end of the program, Meredith shared that she was reading often and that she did enjoy reading. She began praising authors of mysteries and horror books. She suggested that she liked books that kept her thinking. Emily and Meredith both said that they loved the *Abby Hayes* books (Mazer) and talked about reading them continuously. By the end of the study, when Emily’s behavior improved, she increased her time spent reading. It also appeared that matching her with books on her interest and independent reading level increased her engagement and time spent reading. By the end of the study, Emily looked forward to reading magazines and books such as *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980) during independent reading time. At the conclusion of the study, Aden said that he enjoyed independent reading time. He was no longer looking at pictures in magazines during independent reading time but actively reading books. He demonstrated that he was actively reading during independent reading time by the comments he made critiquing the books and describing the genres that he was beginning to enjoy reading. All three of the participants’ increased motivation and desire to read was obvious in their constant request for more time to read and discuss books.
**Aden**

**Engagement.** The second research question sought evidence for, “How did participation in an after-school literacy based program impact adolescents’ affective reading development?”

**Indicators that the student is not engaged.** Although Aden claimed to be an engaged reader of sports and mystery-related material, he did not fare well on academic school-related reading as indicated by the following comments he offered at the study’s onset (II-4/4-B). Aden shared the following statements, “I don’t read because I can’t even concentrate;” “I want to be a good reader but then sometimes I get mad because I like forget what I’m like reading about;” and “Sometimes I like to read in school, sometimes I don’t.” When questioned regarding what makes him not enjoy reading, Aden shared the following comments:

Um, what Emily said about how a mother’s forcing you or people forcing you. That’s the same thing like me ’cause I used to read a lot and a lot, but now my mother is forcing me. Like you have to read this and that, and the only reason that I don’t really like to read is because that subject. I don’t really like to read. That’s why sometimes I don’t like to read.

When Aden was interviewed regarding his feelings about reading at the study’s midpoint (II-5/9-M), he said, “I like to read sometimes. I like to enjoy reading sometimes because sometimes books, sometimes I like to read, sometimes I don’t.” When I asked Aden to expand upon his dislike of reading, he replied:
Because like it runs in the family, because like, how do I explain it? ’Cause it passed down to my generation because my Mom didn’t like to read, my Dad didn’t like to read, my sister didn’t like to read, and I don’t know about my brother ’cause he’s gonna [sic] grow up. I only read when I have assignments, like reading books for assignments. Should I say that? So that I can understand and . . . understand better . . . and if I read, I can learn some new stuff and it can teach you some stuff.

In our second focus group interview (FG-5/10-M), the following conversation occurred between Aden, Meredith, and me regarding their lack of engagement when forced to read a book.

Aden: Um can I say that part? When a book doesn’t show what I mean, what I like then?

Researcher: So if it’s not related to your interests?

Aden: Uh, huh.

Aden: I don’t really call it suck [sic]; I just say I don’t like it.

Researcher: Yes, that’s a better way to do it.

Meredith: I didn’t like when we had to read that book, the Big Wave (Buck, 1968) in reading class. That book was really dumb. Like when you have to be forced to read a book when you don’t want to. I like to read what I want to read.

Researcher: So when you have your choice about what you read, you like it better.
Although Aden’s feelings toward reading appeared to improve somewhat as the study progressed, he still had negative feelings directed toward reading at the study’s conclusion. Aden shared in the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), “Okay, the only thing I hate about reading is when the book is really not getting to me; that’s the only thing that I don’t like about reading.” Throughout the study, Aden contributed his lack of engagement with reading to two factors. He felt that both being forced to read materials that another selected for him and the lack of engagement with reading in his family contributed to his own lack of engagement with reading.

**Indicators that the student is engaged.** Throughout the study, Aden frequently commented regarding the enjoyment he experienced when reading mysteries and sports-related materials (II-4/4-B, FG-5/10-M). He would often select *Two Minute Mysteries* (Sobol, 2004) or *Sports Illustrated for Kids* during independent reading time (FN-4/18-B, FN-4/27-M). The following is a conversation that Aden and I had at the beginning of the program.

**Researcher:** How does reading make you feel? When you’re reading, how does it make you feel?

**Aden:** Um . . . sometimes, it depends what I’m reading, like sometimes if I’m reading a mystery, I just get so thinking [*sic*], I’m thinking a lot and if it’s like sports, I like sports, if it’s sports or . . .

**Researcher:** So how do you feel when you’re reading sports?
Aden: Uh . . . I feel happy because I know what’s going on and I get the . . .
411 on everything, information about his life or like a biography or
Sports Illustrated.

When I asked Aden what he enjoys reading during an early focus group interview
(FG-4/11-B), he said, “I like to read sports books and I like to read mystery books.”
When I asked Aden if there was anything else that he wanted to share at the end of our
initial interview, he said that he wanted me to know that he thinks reading is all right.
Aden was always eager to please and tell me what he thought I wanted to hear (II-4/4-B).

At the beginning of the study, Aden could not name a chapter book that he had
recently read for enjoyment (II-4/4-B). However, toward the midpoint of the study, Aden
demonstrated his engagement with the book The Twits (Dahl, 1980). The following
discussion occurred between Aden and me during a discussion session when he had to
leave the group to get a paper from his locker for a teacher.

Aden: Can I take this book with me?
Researcher: Go ahead and go. You don’t have to take it with you.
Aden: You sure? I’ll read it while I go to my locker.
Researcher: No that’s okay. I don’t want you to trip and fall.
Aden: Are you sure? Positive?
Researcher: Yes.
Aden: I don’t want to miss anything. You sure?
Researcher: Yes, I’m sure.
In the second focus group interview (FG-5/10-M), Aden indicated that he believed reading is important with the following statements: “Reading is important so that you can learn all the basics about things that you need to know for school” and “I was going to say that it is important for you to know the reading and so that you can learn and pass it on through generation[s].” He also shared his engagement with *Two Minute Mysteries* (1969). He said, “*Two Minute Mysteries* really get to you ’cause you have to think really hard . . . and you have to go back to the story and figure it out.”

Aden’s engagement with reading and exploring various genres increased as the study concluded. At the end of the study, I observed Aden on several occasions (FN-5/16-E, FN-5/19-E, and FN-5/26-E) reading the *Goosebumps* books (Stein) during independent reading time. During the beginning sessions of the study Aden only read magazines during independent reading time, spending his time looking at the pictures (FN-4/12-B). As the study progressed, he often read books such as those by Stein, Coville, or Dahl. Aden and I discussed his engagement with Bruce Coville and his novels in our final individual interview of the study (II-6/1-E):

Researcher: Who is your favorite author, and why is he or she your favorite author?

Aden: I like Bruce Coville.

Researcher: Why do you like him?

Aden: Um, because he’s a good author. He made good books.

Researcher: What do you like about his books?

Aden: He makes them a little scary, a little.
In the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), Aden said, “I enjoy reading because sometimes it makes me laugh and sometimes reading can help me. It is easier and funner [sic] now because I learned reading things from the people here to help me like reading.” He also shared how others can increase their positive feelings toward reading. He said, “Well, I guarantee if they at least read for an hour, they can like reading.” The following conversation occurred between Aden and me during the final focus group session:

Aden: . . . oh reading I think it is important to me because that’s the only way for me to get um into college and I’m trying to go to the pros.

Researcher: Okay. So, why if you wanted to be a professional football player, why would you have to know how to read?

Aden: Because the coaches look at your grades and if you don’t start like what you’re doing with reading now, you don’t understand now, you won’t understand when you go through high school and college. I need to learn early.

During our time spent reading, Aden grew from a surveyor of magazine pictures to an engaged reader of books. Reading strategies and connecting Aden with books at his independent reading and interest level encouraged Aden to experience engagement with reading. Aden’s engagement with reading certainly increased as the study progressed.

**Reader perception.**

**Negative reader self-perception.** Although some struggling readers do not have an accurate perception of their own reading ability, Aden was well aware of his many
reading struggles, continuously insisting that he was a poor reader (FN-4/12-B, FN-4/20-B). In an initial focus group interview (FG-4/11-B) regarding his reading ability, Aden claimed that he often required help with understanding what was going on in the main part of the story, and that he was not a good reader because he read slowly. He said he needs help in the area of “comprehending it, . . . when I’m done reading something like if I have to write about it, I don’t . . . understand what I just read.” When Aden was participating in an initial discussion to make meaning group and did not understand what his group was discussing, he said, “See how confused I am always. If it is reading or listening, I am confused.” Aden often did appear confused. For example, the following is an interaction between Aden and me that is representative of his perplexed behaviors that occurred early in the study:

Researcher: So Meredith you should be rewriting your story in that book and dating it. So should you, Aden.

Aden: What story?

Researcher: The story that you just wrote. Did you write this story?

Aden: No, um. Oh ya, ya I wrote it.

Furthermore in an individual interview (II-4/4-B) early in the study, Aden had difficulty listing things he did well as a reader. The following is an excerpt of a conversation that occurred between Aden and me.

Researcher: What do you do well as a reader?

Aden: Um, um, I don’t know.

Researcher: There’s nothing you can think of that you do well as a reader?
Aden: Pronouncing words.

Researcher: Anything else?

Aden: Um . . . I can’t think of any more.

Aden’s negative comments about himself as a reader decreased as the study progressed. However, he still criticized his own reading performance periodically. In the middle of the study, Aden shared that he had to “read long questions over and over again to get them good.” He also said that he needed to learn to read faster. In the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), Aden shared:

Sometimes kids never take the time to read in school. They don’t really like to read because some kids like are really rude, and they like laugh at me because I struggle to read. So I don’t want to read in front of everybody or read period.

Positive reader self-perception. Although the amount of negative comments that Aden made about himself decreased, I did not find a great deal of evidence that supported that study participation increased Aden’s positive perception of himself as a reader. Thus, my look at him in this regard is limited and the reader can only interpret the results as suggestive. Although a few examples of positive comments that Aden offered about how he feels about himself as a reader are found throughout the study, they pale in comparison to his negative comments about himself as a reader. For example, Aden said, “I’m good at . . . um . . . reading the words” and “pronouncing words” in interviews about his reading ability at the beginning of the program” (II-4/4-B).

At the study’s conclusion, Aden seemed to possess more in-depth understanding of his reading ability and how to select an appropriate book to read based on his reading
level and interests. When asked how he selected reading materials and how he decides what he’s going to read, Aden replied:

Um . . . I read the summary of it and see what it’s about and I look at the words and see if it’s my level of reading and I pick a book out that I might like to read. I read a couple pages and if I miss five words on the page, I know it is too hard for me.

He also shared in the final interview that reading was easier and that he was a better reader due to the things he learned and did in the program to help him improve his reading ability (II-6/1-E).

**Perception of other readers.** In an initial focus group interview (FG-4/11-B) regarding his feelings about struggling readers, Aden offered:

They get frustrated and sometimes they try to sound out the words. Or some people they just like quit and they don’t think that it’s that important, and it’s not going to . . . affect them if they don’t learn how to read.

Aden demonstrated an increase in awareness of factors affecting reader self-perception as the study progressed. Aden said that students who struggle to read get mad because they want to read better, and sometimes because of their struggle they no longer read. Aden suggested, “They sometimes just forget about reading, but you gotta [sic] learn how to, ask the teacher if you need some help.”

At the end of the study, Aden suggested that students could improve their reading, would enjoy it more, and feel better about themselves as readers if they read books at their level for an hour a day. He also commented that non-readers should try to read
various genres to explore their interests. He shared that one has to believe in oneself, continue to want to read, and overcome their reading struggles to become a good reader. Many of the suggestions that Aden offered other readers such as exploring other genres, and reading each day are factors that helped him to feel better about reading and himself as a reader.

Emily

**Engagement with reading.**

*Indicators that the student is not engaged.* Emily, social, easily distracted, and inattentive, was often not engaged during independent reading time or reading instruction at the beginning of the study. At the onset of the study, when the teacher was teaching the large group reading strategy lesson on visualization, Emily made faces at a boy who was near her seat (TS-5/5-B). When the teacher asked Emily to share visualization for an excerpt from *The Century Old Women* by Richard Peck (2001) that students had just read together and practiced visualization strategies in, she replied, “I don’t know how to do it.” Furthermore, in the initial focus group interview, Emily described her feelings for reading as follows (FG-4/11-B):

Researcher: What else makes you not like reading?

Emily: I don’t like reading.

Researcher: Why not?

Emily: Because you all know why. I can’t sit still.

Researcher: So you like to do things when you don’t have to sit still?

Emily: Ya, mostly.
She said that she would rather play soccer, basketball and “go outside and play with all my friends and jump on the trampoline” than read. The following discussion occurred during a session between Emily and me (TS-4/12-B):

Researcher: What do you think? Okay tell the truth, whatever you think, whatever your opinion is. What do you think of this book?

Emily: Well some parts of this book are okay but I really don’t like books like this.

Researcher: Why? What don’t you like about it?

Emily: Like how all they do is mainly like dig holes, and then keep doing that. And . . . the same thing is pretty much happening over and over, just like in a different place or a different area.

Emily continued to share comments that reflected her lack of engagement with certain reading materials as the study evolved. The following conversation occurred between Emily and me during the middle of the study, regarding a book with which she was not engaged:

Emily: I didn’t like a really old book that my cousin got me at a garage sale.

It was like Sarah the Great and it wasn’t that great.

Researcher: Sarah Plain and Tall?

Emily: No it was Sarah the Great or something like that.

Researcher: And you didn’t like it?

Emily: Uh-huh

Researcher: Why didn’t you like it?
Emily: It is like really boring like, all, it was all at the same place. Like every day she just came home, tutored a kid, go back to school, and come back home. That’s all she did the whole time.

Researcher: So it repeated the same things over and over again?

In the final focus group interview I asked Emily how the after-school program failed to help her in the area of reading. She replied, “Um the thing that’s not helped me is involving me in more reading things.” Emily shared the following statement in the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E):

Alright. I don’t like reading when you’re forced to read something that you don’t want to. Like when you have to read like books in class that I don’t like reading, like out loud with a whole class. Because I think it takes longer that way and some people like really read slow and I don’t want to hear them. I prefer to read by myself.

Emily indicated during the course of the study that being forced to read a book selected by another individual for her to read, her behavior and her interests led her to not be engaged with reading.

**Indicators that the student is engaged.** Emily said that she did enjoy reading when the stories are interesting and weird. She said that she likes to read a book based on what the characters are like. She shared she liked reading when “the characters and stuff, sometimes they’re weird.” She also added, “The more you read, and the better you become” (FN-4/25-M). As the study progressed and Emily selected engaging materials on her independent reading level, her engagement with reading increased. Emily made
the following comments during the second focus group interview (FG-4/11-B), which indicated her engagement with reading was increasing. She said, “Reading is important because um you learn more and so that you know what you’re talking about.” During the second individual interview, Emily demonstrated her engagement with reading by stating (II-5/9-M):

It depends on what kind of books I read. Like if I read adventure, like something my friends like to put on a play about it. Like we’ll read the same book and if it’s . . . something sad and emotional, I’ll cry.

During the second individual interview (II-5/9-M), Emily shared, “I love reading because now I do it every night, most of the time. Every once in a while, my dad will take me out and get a new book for me. And I always read most of them.” Furthermore, during the final focus group interview, the following conversation occurred between Emily and me:

Emily: I like reading and it’s like excited, it . . . calms me down and it’s like my own little place where it won’t matter what . . . anybody else says or anything.

Researcher: That’s a good answer. Can you think of anything else that makes you enjoy reading?

Emily: When I just . . . go off in the book. I don’t have to worry about . . . all my problems or anything. I just . . . go off in the book.

Emily demonstrated that she was engaged with reading when she suggested that she selects a book by the cover and the summary on the back of the book. She said that
she wants to read the book if it is, “an adventure or . . . something like a kid who’s gonna [sic] get in trouble to see how it turns out to the end. “

**Reader perception.**

**Negative reader self-perception.** In an initial interview, Emily said that she struggles to comprehend material when she is done reading. She shared that an area that is difficult for her is, “Understanding, after I’m finished, understanding what it means.” In addition, during the initial focus group interview (II-4/11-B), Emily offered, “Sometimes I get mad . . . I want to become a good reader, but . . . I don’t comprehend . . . I get mad . . . I want to be like other kids and . . . read better sometimes.”

At the conclusion of the study, Emily offered that she needed to improve in the area of reading fluency. She said:

Pausing at periods and commas and I don’t really stop at all. Sometimes I just keep running on like a run on sentence. Most of the time I miss the right words and I read a little faster than most people do.

At the conclusion of the study according to my field notes and her performance on the *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2008), comprehension was also still a weak area of reading for Emily, but she did not mention it as an area she needed to improve (FN-5/23-E). On the final *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2008) assessment she scored at fifth grade level for independent reading.

**Positive reader self-perception.** In the initial individual interview (II-4/4-B), Emily suggested that she is good at figuring out hard and long words. During our final focus group (FG-6/2-E), Emily again suggested that she is good at “figuring out hard
words and long words.” These are the extent of the positive comments that Emily offered about herself as a reader.

**Perception of other readers.** In a focus group interview at the study’s midpoint (FG-4/11-M), Emily said that students who struggle to read do not comprehend and become angry because they want to be like other readers. She shared that good readers visualize, do diagrams, and make pictures when they read. In the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), Emily shared a thoughtful insight regarding students who struggle to read. She suggested, “If kids are struggling, like they have problems in reading where they just can’t read period, they usually try and sound out the words, but reading right is more than sounding out the words.” When asked in the final focus group session what someone who struggles to read does when they read, Emily made the following statement:

They’ll use excuses . . . if they don’t want to read, they’ll use excuses like . . . the word’s too hard or I don’t feel like reading. Like they don’t want to read and . . . they’ll sit there in the middle of the page if they don’t know the word and they’ll go “ah” and they’ll wait and then if they get lost like I get lost, they use a bunch of excuses and they say words like “um” and “ah” and “yeah.”

**Meredith**

**Engagement.**

**Indicators that the student is not engaged.** At the study’s onset, Meredith shared that she does not enjoy reading because, “I can never sit still. I do not like to read. Once
in awhile, I’ll just sit still, but I know reading just won’t happen, I guess.’” In our first focus group interview (FG-4/11-B), Meredith made the comments as follows:

Meredith: I don’t like to read when people are like making you read, like if it’s something you don’t want to read and they . . . force you to read anyway, then I don’t get interested in that book.

Aden: My mom does that.

Researcher: Okay anything else that makes you not enjoy reading?

Meredith: Like Aden said, um, like if they force you to read, I don’t like to read, but like I usually judge the books by the backs of their covers like on the back of their cover, you have like little narratives of the story. . . . Sometimes . . . I’ve already read stories like a million times and then it’s like the teacher or parent forces you to read it. Like sometimes I act like I’m reading the book ’cause I already know what it’s about and I don’t want to read it again, so I just act like I’m reading it.

Meredith discussed the importance of having a choice regarding what she reads: “In school you really don’t have a choice, if you don’t get to pick what you read. If I . . . like a murder or something like that.”

During a discussion to make meaning session at the study midpoint, Meredith complained that the required reading for the sixth grade reading courses, The Big Wave (1976) was “really dumb.” She added, “. . . you have to be forced . . . to read a book you don’t want to, I like to read what I want to read. “
At the end of the study in discussing text Meredith said, “I didn’t understand, because you don’t know what they’re really meaning and . . . if you read it by yourself, you don’t know what they’re talking about.” Meredith suggested throughout the study her aversion to reading when others forced her to read a particular text or genre with which she was not engaged.

**Indicators that the student is engaged.** I did not have a great deal of data that suggested Meredith’s engagement with reading early in the study. In the initial interview, Meredith confessed (II-4/4-B):

> Well some books, I really don’t feel great about because I think that’s the problem with me. I can’t sit still cause [sic] I really don’t find anything I’m interested in, but I had found a book where I was able to sit still and read it. I felt like I really got into it and it was really good and it was full of adventure and excitement.

During our second focus group interview (FG-4/11-M), Meredith made several comments to demonstrate that her engagement with reading was increasing. She suggested, “reading and stuff are important and if you can’t read well, you won’t be able to get a job.” Meredith further demonstrated her engagement with reading in the second individual interview (II-5/9-M): “Like if it’s something sad, I feel sad, it’s something like strange, I’d start like feeling excited.” She also said that *Holes* (Sachar, 2001) “was such a mystery, it made you want to keep reading on and on and on.” During the midpoint interview, Meredith also said, “Yeah, I enjoy reading because it’s like you can . . . do it whenever you want and it keeps you out of trouble in a way and it’s . . . fun and interesting to read certain books.” She further shared, “It is important because you have
to read like every day like no matter what class you’re in. It could be math or whatever; you still have to read like the directions in the book and all that stuff. “

At the conclusion of the program, Meredith was asked how the after-school program helped her. She replied, “I thought it helped me be more fluent and . . . like reading.” She further demonstrated her engagement with reading during the final program interview, stating (II-6/1-E):

Well, like if the story’s like about horror sometimes it like makes me . . . more interested in it and about what happens next . . . um . . . I don’t know, I get . . . lost when I read a book . . . a bad mood if I’m in one.

In addition, Meredith shared that reading is important because, “you’re really not going to get nowhere [sic] without it, I mean nowhere [sic] without it because it’ll give you a lot of information that you may need one day in life.” She also shared the following statement in the final focus group session:

It’s important because if you don’t read, you won’t be able to get good jobs. You won’t have a really good life and if you don’t have money and stuff, you’ll have to live with your parents and that would really stink.

As the study concluded, it was apparent that Meredith’s engagement with reading increased when she was able to select reading genres and materials that were at her independent reading level. She also indicated that she was engaged with text that invoked her to experience emotion such as excitement and sadness.

**Reader perception.**
Negative reader self-perception. Meredith appeared to possess an adequate perception of her reading abilities from the beginning of the study. She knew that reading was a struggle for her and that novels on a sixth-grade reading level were too difficult for her. She was able to reflect on her reading abilities in statements such as these: “I have trouble like comprehending it” and “When I’m done with reading something, I don’t understand what I just read” and (II-4/9-M):

Sometimes I need help understanding what it’s . . . main idea is or what he’s saying. If it says if it’s describing something but it’s not actually saying it on the page, I don’t understand how to figure it out when they don’t say it.

Meredith continued to critique her reading weaknesses as the study evolved. Meredith shared at the study’s midpoint that she did not like reading because she is really not a good reader. She felt that she was not a good reader because she reads really slowly. She worried aloud about not being a good reader in statements such as this (II-4/9-M):

If you don’t read correctly then . . . you can mess up on a question or . . . if you’re trying to get a job or something if you read something wrong you might not get that answer right and you might not get the job.

When asked what she does well as a reader, she said, “I’m not sure. If I have to answer extended response questions, I have to read them over and over to answer them.”

Meredith, often sullen and withdrawn, negatively critiqued her own performance frequently. For instance, Meredith contended:
I am kind of stupid but I was just wondering, well they probably tell it in here but my question was why, why does he think of himself as . . . the hero? Because I don’t think he is a hero but I guess I am wrong because everyone else does. (TS-5/4-M)

At the end of the study in the final focus group interview (FG-6/2-E), Meredith shared, “If I am struggling with reading, I’ll . . . try to re-read and then if I get frustrated, I’ll just like quit reading or stop for a while and then I might go back and just get rid of the book or something.” She also shared, “if I have to . . . silently read and like reading out loud helps you, you can maybe whisper it instead of saying it out loud, real loud.” Meredith also shared that she has difficulty focusing when reading so she has “something that I can . . . put on the line so I won’t lose my place and just move along at a time and take the story little by little. “

**Positive reader self-perception.** I found little evidence of Meredith making positive comments about her own reading ability. She said that she was good at sounding out words and vocabulary in the initial and final interviews and focus group interviews (II-4/4-B, FG-4/11-B, II-6/1-E, FG-6/2-E). Her perception of herself as a reader was positive in the sense that she possessed an accurate perception of herself as a reader and understood what she needed to do to improve her reading skills.

**Perception of others as readers.** In an initial focus group interview, Meredith said, “I think that like sometimes people who can’t read real well or think they can’t, they just normally like give up or stop reading.” At the conclusion of the study, Meredith possessed well-developed insight regarding her perception of other readers. She shared
during a discussion (TS-5/26-E) that struggling readers “get frustrated like my little sister, she gets frustrated when she tries to read ’cause she can’t pronounce it right and she just gets frustrated because she is only in the first grade but she has to read.” She shared during the final focus group (FG-6/2-E) interview that good readers, “if they have trouble or something they’ll like start reading around the word that can give them clues if they don’t know what the word means.”

Cross Case Analysis

Having previously detailed each case, the concluding remarks of Chapter 4 presents the cross-case analysis of the affective data for the three participants.

Engagement

At the beginning of the study, Aden said he was an engaged reader of sports and mystery-related reading material. However, during independent reading time, he spent his time looking at pictures in sports-related material. He was not an engaged reader of academic text at the beginning or end of the study. Academic assigned readings were often above his independent reading level. Emily also was not an engaged reader of academic text. Both Emily and Aden made several comments regarding their inability to stay engaged with text at the beginning of the study due to attention-related struggles. In addition, both Emily and Meredith said that they experience difficulty sitting still to read. It appeared Meredith was able to stay on task and interact with academic text with greater ease than the other two participants. At the beginning of the study, both Meredith and Emily listed books and read books during independent time that were intended for younger children. Once the study began, the participants appeared engaged with the
stories in the *Daybook of Critical Reading and Writing* (Spandel, 2001), which included engaging excerpts from quality children’s literature that were written on a fifth grade level.

Emily, Aden, and Meredith often spoke of their lack of engagement when being forced to read text they did not select. Emily was adamant against being forced to read. She wanted to read books that were self-selected. She also wanted to select, read, and discuss books with her peer group. Meredith suggested that all school reading was forced reading and the other two participants agreed. The students all said that they felt that they did not have a choice in what they read during the school day. All three participants mentioned words like *frustrated, giving up,* and *quitting* related to reading.

At the end of the study, Emily often made positive comments regarding her feelings about reading; however, at the beginning of the study her comments toward reading were derogatory in nature. All three of the participants made repeated negative comments about reading at the beginning of the study. Emily continued to make negative comments about reading throughout the study but they decreased as the study progressed. However, at the end of the study, Emily and the other two participants stated that they loved reading. As the study progressed, the participants demonstrated their engagement as they began to associate reading with the emotions it invoked in them such as excitement, sadness, and feelings of escape. During interviews and in their general comments throughout the study the students described their feelings as they reflected on being much more engaged with discussing books rather than completing paper-and-pencil tasks after reading a book.
As the study progressed, Aden became an engaged reader of novels, such as those by Stein, Coville and Dahl. As Emily’s behavior improved, so did her engagement with reading. She was highly engaged when reading her choice of genre: mysteries or adventure books. Emily said she liked reading about weird things. At the end of the study Meredith said that she enjoyed reading, especially horror and adventure books. Aden and Meredith were both highly engaged with *Holes* (Sachar, 2001), but Emily found it repetitive. All three participants loved reading *The Twits* (Dahl, 1980).

Throughout the study, I questioned the participants regarding what they most enjoyed about the after-school program. All three participants repeatedly shared that they enjoyed reading books that they selected and discussing them with one another. Numerous entries in my field notes highlight context where participants were excited about reading (FN-4/27-M, FN-5/16-E). The following are examples of statements in my field notes that indicate student engagement: “Aden and Meredith are motivated to read and discuss books” (FN-4/18-B); “The children ask for discussion time and time to read” (FN-4/27-M); “Emily’s behavior is great. She is becoming a leader during discussion time” (FN-5/2-M); “The students were highly involved in our discussion of *Twits* and offered wonderful ideas and character analysis” (FN-4/25-M); “Their discussion was well developed and it was obvious that they participated in engaged reading during independent reading time;” and “They asked me if they could have more time to read during independent reading time” (FN-5/25-E).
Reader Self-Perception

Tables 21 and 22 display participant reader self-perception scores from the Henk and Melnick (1995) *Reader Self-Perception Scale* at the beginning and end of the study. The scale assesses participants in the following areas: progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states.
Table 21

Assessment Scores From the Henk and Melnick, Reader Self-Perception Scale in the Areas of Progress and Observational Comparison (1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Progress (Beginning)</th>
<th>Progress (End)</th>
<th>Observational Comparison (Beginning)</th>
<th>Observational Comparison (End)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aden</td>
<td>18 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>34 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>12 of 30 (low)</td>
<td>14 of 30 (low)</td>
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<td>34 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>17 of 30 (low)</td>
<td>16 of 30 (low)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
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<td>36 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>11 of 30 (low)</td>
<td>16 of 30 (low)</td>
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Table 22

Assessment Scores From the Henk and Melnick, Reader Self-Perception Scale in the Areas of Social Feedback and Physiological States (1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Social Feedback (End)</th>
<th>Physiological States (Beginning)</th>
<th>Physiological States (End)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>26 of 45 (low)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>22 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>20 of 45 (Low)</td>
<td>16 of 40 (low)</td>
<td>21 of 40 (low)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>19 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>25 of 45 (low)</td>
<td>14 of 40 (low)</td>
<td>30 of 40 (low)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although all participants scored in the low range on the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) at both the beginning and the end of the study, individual participant scores rose within the low range in most categories. Accordingly, all three participants had difficulty listing things they did well as readers. They each focused on stating that they are good at pronouncing or sounding out words when asked what they do well as readers. Emily said that she was good at decoding words and that sounding out words was her strength in reading. Meredith suggested that she was good at decoding words. Meredith had the most difficult time praising her reading strengths of the three participants. Aden focused on pronouncing words as his strength.

More often, the participants all made negative statements about their reading abilities. Aden made negative statements regarding his ability to comprehend and read fluently. He commented that he was often confused and had difficulty following written and oral directions. At the end of the program, Aden and Emily both wished they did not have to read in front of others in the classroom setting. Emily mentioned anger and her frustration associated with reading several times throughout the study. Emily felt comprehension and fluency were her weak areas. Meredith said that her comprehension and inferencing abilities were low.

Two of the participants’ insight regarding self as a reader seemed to improve as the study progressed. Aden developed his awareness and ability of how to select appropriate text. He also improved his awareness of how to develop one’s positive reader self-perception and reading ability. Emily was not as forthcoming with analysis of her own reading ability. Meredith possessed a well-developed perception of her reading
weaknesses from the beginning of the study. As the study progressed, she knew what to do to a greater degree than the other participants to improve her reading ability and was more willing to try to improve her reading.

The three participants all possessed insight and opinions regarding other readers. Emily suggested that struggling readers do not possess skills or strategies to make them proficient readers. Emily also felt that struggling readers make excuses so that they do not have to read in front of others. Meredith felt that people who cannot read will become frustrated and give up. Meredith often spoke of frustration associated with reading and struggling readers giving up. Emily reported that struggling readers, including her, express anger due to their poor reading abilities. Meredith suggested that good readers use reading strategies.

**Summary**

Individual case studies were created from analysis of 32 field note entries, 16 transcripts, and 18 interviews to describe each participant’s actions and words in rich detail. Data included analysis of the participants’ reading performance prior to the start of the study and participants’ reading experiences (words and actions) throughout the study. Individual case studies were developed to answer the research questions in order to portray a picture of what happens to a struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive and affective reading development when they participate in an after-school program.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Significance and Summary of the Study

As a literacy teacher and coach, I was frustrated with my school’s race to prepare students for the Ohio Proficiency Tests. Students’ literacy needs should be defined and their remediation plan prescribed on a more balanced foundation than that of a test score. Thus, intervention intended for struggling readers should strive to accomplish more than Ohio Proficiency Test passage (Buly & Valencia, 2002). However, in past practice, we seemed to design intervention that was void of rich literacy experiences for our struggling adolescent reader population. Such interventions may prepare students as test takers but fail to help students create meaning during reading. Thus, they do not ignite pleasure reading, subsequently failing to create lifelong readers (Moore, 2008).

I felt in order for my participants to view reading as important, they must engage in reading for enjoyment (Strickland & Walker, 2004). The struggling readers at my school needed to experience rich choices in what they read and to learn strategies to make reading easier so that they could engage in meaningful discussion about text (Moore et al., 1999). They also needed validation and encouragement in knowing that their feelings about reading and about themselves as readers were respected and had potential to improve (O’Brien & Dillion, 2008). Moreover, I was thrilled when given the opportunity to design and direct an after-school program with the aforementioned principles for the struggling readers at my school. The study of the after-school program occurred during
the second semester of the 2004-2005 school years for a period of eight and one-half weeks.

As a facilitator immersed in the experiences of the three struggling readers during the after-school program, I explored what happened to the participants’ cognitive and affective reading development. I sought to answer the research questions: “What happens to struggling adolescent readers’ cognitive reading development during their participation in an after school program?,” and “What happens to struggling adolescent readers’ affective reading development during their participation in an after school program?”

A qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1998) was implemented to describe, interpret, and report findings regarding each participant’s cognitive and affective reading development. To examine the after-school literacy-based program’s effectiveness, I considered the three, purposively selected participants’ cognitive and affective reading development through their words, actions, and experiences. The following data sources allowed me to explore the students’ participation in the after-school program: The Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995), Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2001), field notes, transcriptions, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. This study sought to explore the experiences of three struggling readers as they participated in literacy intervention that was rich in conversation about text, vocabulary, and reading strategies and validated their feelings about reading and themselves as readers.

A constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was executed to analyze data in order to examine changes in student cognitive and affective reading development as the
after-school literacy program evolved. Once individual case data were presented, data were compared to employ a cross case analysis. The conclusions of the study are organized according to research questions. These conclusions resulted from thorough data analysis that contributes to the field of literacy research.

**Conclusions**

The following conclusions are listed under the research question to which they pertain. Following each conclusion is an explanation that includes the broad themes I discovered supported by the data. The chapter is organized with the following headings: conclusions, implications, and future suggestions for research. Each conclusion is italicized and precedes the research-based explanation that supports it. The two research questions as well the following aspects of the program govern the organization of the findings section: vocabulary, discussion, reading strategies, engagement, and reader self-perception.

Research Question 1. How will participation in an after-school program impact the adolescents’ cognitive development as readers?

**Vocabulary**

1. Connecting words and text to their own lives helped students with vocabulary acquisition and meaning making of text.

   Person-to-text, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections were powerful tools for helping the three participants make meaning of text and vocabulary words. Teaching students to utilize the reading strategy of making connections improved all three participants’ reading development (Duke & Peterson, 2002). It was one of the few
strategies that all three participants practiced independently after instruction had occurred. After being taught the strategy during a reciprocal teaching lesson, the three participants made 79 connections in order to make meaning during the study.

The aforementioned conclusion is important in that it demonstrates the importance of teachers viewing students’ connections to their own lives as vehicles for meaning making rather than off-topic comments (Dean & Small, 1997). The conclusion is also noteworthy as it supports the idea of allowing student choice in reading material selection so they can connect with materials related to their own lives (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004). When the participants had choice and could relate text to their own lives, they appeared to be more engaged readers (O’Brien & Dillon, 2008). During the study participants had the opportunities to select what they wanted to read, where they wanted to read, and what vocabulary they wished to study. They experienced ownership of their learning and accomplished reading growth (Alm, 1981). Throughout the course of the study, the participants decreased their incidences of: (a) repeating others’ responses rather than formulating their own responses, (b) failing to be prepared for a discussion, and (c) being off task during a discussion (Tables 15, 17, and 19). They also increased incidences of (a) leadership, (b) collaboration, (c) motivation, and (d) the meaningful comments that they offered during discussions (Tables 16, 18, and 20). Furthermore, all three participants raised their independent level on the vocabulary assessment of the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008) from pre-test to post-test. Both Emily and Meredith raised their comprehension assessment, independent level on the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008) from pre-test to post-test assessment (Table 5).
2. Students made growth in their knowledge of vocabulary during word wall exercises.

During our word wall time together, participants taught a word they had selected from their environment to the other two participants and the instructor. Being able to teach vocabulary words is a higher order skill that facilitated and demonstrated the students’ learning of the word (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001). Then the participants discussed the word and added it to our word wall. The words were displayed on the wall for constant review. Encouraging participant selection of vocabulary words positively influenced their interest and knowledge in vocabulary study (Ruddell & Shearer, 2002). Discussing vocabulary words with peers improved participant vocabulary acquisition (Ruddell & Shearer, 2002; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). As Table 5 demonstrates, all three participants raised their independent level on the vocabulary assessment on the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2001) from pre-test to post-test. Reflecting upon and studying vocabulary as the words appeared in text or other facets of the participants’ environment increased student interest and understanding of vocabulary. Furthermore, exploring vocabulary in text that was engaging to them increased participant vocabulary acquisition (Arthur, 1999). All three participants enjoyed discussing words found in The Twits (Dahl, 1980), perhaps because they were highly engaged with the text. Vocabulary work in text that the participants found engaging appeared to influence the success of vocabulary activities during the study. Although Aden continued to struggle with vocabulary understanding throughout the study, discussion of vocabulary words with his peers did appear to help him understand
word meanings. Words that the other participants appeared to understand were foreign to Aden; he learned from listening to the other participants discuss them (Bromley, 2008).

3. Struggling readers are individuals with diverse needs and strengths.

Although all three participants were classified as struggling readers, they had diverse needs and strengths. Even though they were selected for study participation because they had similar assessment scores initially, it became apparent throughout the study that their strengths and weaknesses regarding their literacy performance were very diverse. Data analysis supported the importance of learning about struggling readers as individuals, and gathering information to paint a picture of them as readers with more than a proficiency test score (Buly & Valencia, 2002).

For instance, Aden, who had a language other than English spoken in his home, needed intensive intervention beyond that of what the other two participants needed (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Aden required additional experience with decoding phonological, semantic, and syntactical cues. Lack of phonetic understanding and decoding knowledge interfered with his vocabulary acquisition. Although Ohio Department of Education standards for phonetic acquisition stop at the third grade level, Aden did not know how to sound out or decode words. He also struggled with the semantic and syntactical cues the English language provides. He may have not acquired these important phonetic and decoding skills early in his literacy development as he was learning both English and Arabic. Since he was a struggling reader, exposure to both language systems may have confused him (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Although he had received fragmented ESL services early in his educational career, he did not appear to
master syntactical or semantic understanding of the English language (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

The study did not provide enough time or as intensive intervention as Aden required. To further his vocabulary growth, Aden may need an intensive phonics and word attack program focusing on how to interpret semantic and syntactic cues. He would also benefit from word origin and root and affix instruction (Hennings, 2000). The aforementioned recommendations were shared with his mother at the end of the study as well as placed in his school file.

Emily’s behavior interfered with her learning. As Emily’s behavior improved so did her reading performance. Meredith’s reading development progressed once she became more comfortable in the group as a discussion participant. Each participant had different group interactions skills. Emily and Meredith assumed leadership roles, whereas Aden was often a contributor or follower in discussions. Emily and Meredith often noticed and pointed out that Aden was off task or not contributing to the group discussion, often critiquing his performance. Goatley (1997) found:

Peer-led literature discussion groups provided students with the opportunity to develop and maintain a unique discourse community in which each member contributed to the group’s construction of meaning as students participated in a variety of ways, taking on different roles such as leader, facilitator, and observer. (p. 376)

Hence the data in this study demonstrated not only the need that the three participants in this study had for an individualized curriculum, but that one is needed for
all struggling learners for them to grow as readers (Hehir, 2007). The aforementioned conclusion points to the necessity of knowing students’ assessment results (strengths and weaknesses), reading histories, and interests when designing curriculum and instruction for struggling readers. Considering individual differences in the struggling reader population leads to appropriate differentiation of curriculum and backward design. Backward design involves meeting the learner where they are and designing curriculum and instruction based on the learner’s strengths and weaknesses (multi-factored assessment results; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The finding also points out the importance of considering student voice and observation of student behavior when planning curriculum and instruction. In listening to the participants’ views of themselves and others as readers, how they felt about text, their strategy knowledge, and their think-aloud process, I was better able to gear instruction to their individual needs and build on their strengths. Student reflection regarding curriculum and instructional practices provides educators with another window to view student learning and their own teaching. Although teachers do not have time in the regular school day to implement practices in the study such as audio-taping each instructional session and transcribing the tapes, possible venues for listening to student voice do exist. For instance, teachers can tape record student discussions periodically, journal with students regarding their meta-cognitive processes, implement entrance and exit slips, and meet with students in small focus groups to discuss curricular and instructional practices.
Discussion to Make Meaning

1. Struggling readers need a great deal of direct teacher modeling and instruction during discussion exercises in order to be able to engage in appropriate, meaningful discussions of text.

Students need to know how to participate effectively in group discussions before discussions can support their learning (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Duke & Peterson, 2002). The participants in this study had little understanding of how to discuss text at the onset of the study, as evidenced by results that discussed their: (a) lack of preparation for discussion, (b) reliance on repeating one another’s answers, and (c) off-task behavior during discussions. After the modeling of appropriate group interactions and reciprocal teaching exercises, the struggling readers became confident and skilled in small group interactions with one another (Collins et al., 1989; Vygotsky, 1978).

Having taught many struggling readers as students in my regular classroom, I knew that they did not often fully participate in classroom group work situations; they were what appeared to be, at times, passive participants in book discussions. Subsequently, they felt poorly about themselves as readers (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Aden appeared from a distance as a wonderful conversationalist and active group member. Likewise, Emily was outgoing and talkative in both the study and my classroom during the school day. Thus, I expected, based on their personalities and my observations of them in groups during the regular school day, that both were active participants in discussion situations. Since Meredith had not been my student, I did not
have a preconceived notion regarding her group work behavior. As the study developed, I learned that Emily and Aden as well as Meredith did not know how to participate fully in book discussions.

Observing Aden closely in discussion sessions led me to ponder how many struggling readers repeat more able reader’s answers in literature circle or group work discussions in order to make the teacher or fellow group members believe they are active participants. This is noteworthy as Aden had been my student during the regular school day for the previous two years and up until the point of my observations during the study, I viewed him as an active and contributing member of group discussions. However, at the beginning of the study, he was not. He constantly repeated the other participants’ answers to make it appear he was a contributing group member.

Aden waited to see what the other participants in the group offered and then repeated their answers. Aden also relied on his peer’s discussion of a word’s meaning to gain understanding, and then he would use it in a sentence similar to the one his peers stated. Although mimicking other students’ answers or responses was not my goal for Aden’s reading development, the other participants’ answers served as a model for Aden. Aden’s collaborative behavior of copying other participants’ responses seemed to lead him to improve his discussion to make meaning responses as the study progressed.

Student behaviors in the struggling reader population can also interfere with reading development. Emily’s data indicate that her behaviors may have masked or inhibited her reading potential. Emily’s behavior improved once my comments and instruction lessened and she had the opportunity to be an active participant in the
discussions. Emily’s early unsuccessful group performance is significant as it represents the plight of many struggling readers as they struggle to fit into the group dynamics. They often use disruptive behavior to mask their own inadequacies in reading and discussing grade-level material that is too difficult for them to read successfully (McKenna et al., 1995; Vogt, 1997). At the time of the study, I observed Emily in my social studies class as well as her science class, and this is exactly what she did. The textbooks that the school required teachers to use were too difficult for her to read and discuss so she found another way to contribute to her small group discussions; she entertained them with her inappropriate behaviors. Extensive modeling, practice, and books on her reading level shaped Emily’s blunt, attention-seeking behavior into that of an out-spoken leader.

Although it became apparent as the study progressed that the participants must have been continuously floundering in group situations throughout their educational careers, no one, including myself, had provided the extensive modeling and practice that they needed to become full participants in book discussions (Collins et al., 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). Many students who struggle with reading do not have the opportunity to participate in peer led discussions (Routman, 2003). Commeyas and DeGroff (as cited in Lloyd, 2004) offered:

Although 95% of educators agree that it’s valuable for students to participate in peer discussion . . . and 77% indicate their interest in using peer discussion in their classrooms, it’s sad that only 33% of these same educators report using peer discussions with students. (p. 115)
It is natural and developmentally appropriate for sixth graders to talk about books and share their voices to make meaning rather than to be silent vessels that the teacher fills with knowledge (Freire, 2004). Teachers sometime sacrifice meaningful literacy activities for drill-and-skill activities for struggling readers (Strickland & Walker, 2004). This is unfortunate because in observing, modeling, and practicing appropriate book discussions, the participants’ discussion abilities advanced (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Goodlad, 1984).

The students had a chance to shine as both discussion leaders and participants, something struggling readers often may not experience in the regular classroom (Goodlad, 1984). The collaboration and cooperation that evolved between the three participants during this study was amazing to observe as evidenced by my findings which supported that the three participants’ collaborative, cooperative, and leadership behaviors improved as the study evolved. My main goal for the participants was to make their voices heard. Another behavior that differed from their performance in the regular education classroom was that in the study, the three participants were reading books at their independent reading level of grade five. Time spent reading engaging books at their independent level greatly increased their understanding and ability to appropriately discuss what they read (Allington, 2001; Guthrie, 2004; Routman, 2003). Contrastingly, in the sixth grade social studies curriculum they often were reading and discussing the sixth grade mandated text, which is written at or above a sixth grade level. Students do not function as active, eager participants in groups that are discussing books they cannot adequately read.
2. Struggling readers thrive in a small intimate setting that promotes group discussion of text.

Throughout the analysis of data, I often reflected on the contrasting performance of Aden and Emily in the regular education school day and what I observed during the study. I had direct observation of Aden’s performance in the regular education environment the two-year period that occurred before and during the study. I was Aden’s fifth grade language arts teacher, and Aden’s and Emily’s social studies teacher during their sixth grade school year, which occurred concurrently with the study. My field notes often referred to the contrast between the students’ participation in the regular education environment and their participation in the small group setting, which occurred during the study. The two students rarely raised their hands to participate in the regular classroom nor were they willing participants during group work in the regular education environment as I thought they had been. However, in the after-school program, both in large group and small group settings, all three participants demonstrated active, engaged participation as the study developed. In smaller groups struggling readers feel safe (Raphael, Brock, & Wallace, 1997). The intimate setting of the small group intervention may have encouraged the participants to take chances, reduced their stress level related to their reading struggles, and allowed them to build trusting relationships. The individual attention that the small group setting provided helped to remediate student weaknesses in reading, improve inappropriate behavior, and overcome negative feelings related to reading self-perception. The small number of students in the group also enabled me to observe and encourage student participation to a greater extent than I was able to do in...
the regular classroom. For instance, in the study I noticed that Aden often repeated other students’ answers, something that I failed to notice in the regular classroom when I was his teacher for two years. The participants thrived once they participated in direct teacher modeling of how to discuss a book and had opportunity to practice discussing text (Berne & Clark, 2006).

The participants also developed leadership skills. Almasi (1996) suggested that a social emotional benefit of group discussion arises when students participate in a variety of discussion roles, including those typically performed by the teacher. The participants learned from and relied upon one another to help them make meaning. Small group discussions facilitate bonds and friendships (Almasi & Gambrell, 1997). Hopefully the participants’ growth in the ability to appropriately discuss a book to gain meaning will transfer to the regular education environment, a place where the voice of the struggling adolescent reader is often not heard. Struggling readers need time to read and discuss books to make meaning of what they read (Goodlad, 1984; Strickland & Walker, 2004).

**Reading Strategies**

1. Struggling readers do not have knowledge of reading strategies nor do they use them when reading.

The following question arose in my mind during the study as I observed students’ lack of knowledge regarding reading strategies: Are teachers not teaching reading strategies or are students exposed to them during instruction but not using them? (Durkin, 1979; Leinhardt et al., 1981; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistrella-Hampton, & Echevarria, 1998). At the beginning of the study all three participants could not define or
explain how they used more than three reading strategies each. They defined surface-level, passive practices such as asking another for help and relying on sounding words out as their reading strategies. They were able to passively use surface-level strategies. I know that when I was Aden’s fifth grade teacher, I taught reading strategies as part of my language arts curriculum. As building literacy coach, I trained and encouraged the other teachers in my building to also teach reading strategies to their students. Thus, Meredith, Aden, and Emily were exposed to reading strategy instruction at some point in their middle school careers. Yet they had little knowledge of reading strategies during the initial focus group or individual interviews. Reciprocal teaching, which includes constant modeling and practice, is the key to successful reading strategy knowledge and usage in the struggling reader population (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999). Engaging in the reciprocal teaching process increased student knowledge of reading strategies. Even with constant practice and modeling of strategies for the eight week period during the study, evidence of student implementation of strategies independent of the teachers was minimal. It appeared that length of the study and intensity of the reciprocal teaching needed to be extended.

**Engagement**

1. Discussing books with their peers increased students’ engagement with reading.

Components of literacy instruction should focus on the factors that motivate students to read text as well as factors that enhance reading ability (Allington, 2001; Bean, 2002; Guthrie, 2004). Discussion empowered Aden, Emily, and Meredith as active participants in learning, more so than when they participated in passive activities such as
reading and answering questions about what they read or defining vocabulary words by looking them up in the dictionary. Like many struggling readers, they were far too accustomed to these rituals (Gee, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1978). Discussion group members facilitated the discussions through their questions, insightful responses, cooperative behaviors, and collaboration (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). The participants continuously requested that we read and discuss books throughout the study.

2. Struggling readers’ lack of preparation for assignments may impede their reading progress.

As evidenced by Aden’s failure to prepare for word wall sessions, struggling readers often lack in the desire, motivation, and skills necessary to complete independent assignments (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). He passively refused to use a dictionary or other source to prepare him with the knowledge of what unknown words meant so that he could teach the words to his peers. He relied on the strategy of listening to what his peers said and repeating their answers when he was not prepared. All three of the participants spoke of attempting to read at home and to complete homework but being prevented from doing so by younger siblings. Subsequently, limited outside-of-school reading also affects a child’s vocabulary development (Ivey, 1999; Stanovich, 1986). Students become better readers and learn to read from reading (Strickland & Walker, 2004). Unless parents support and enforce a structured time and environment for study and reading, it is likely that interruptions will prevent it from occurring (Moore et al., 1999). Struggling readers also are not motivated to complete work that is too difficult for them to read (Worthy, Broaddus, Ivey, 2001); subsequently, the need for leveled reading
materials in reading classes as well as content-related courses is necessary (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

3. When students had choice in reading material selection, student engagement increased.

Aden experienced higher levels of engagement with reading when he was reading sports or mystery-related text. Meredith and Emily said they were more on task and engaged in their independent reading when they could select mystery or adventure texts. This is noteworthy as it demonstrates the need to allow all students choice during the school day regarding what they read and discuss, especially the struggling reader and alliterate populations. It is important to use engaging text that is authentic for literature discussion (Moore et al., 1999; Routman, 2003). In selecting their reading materials, students experienced ownership of their learning (Allington, 1994). An example of Aden’s increased engagement with text occurred when he did not want to leave the room when we were reading and discussing The Twits. This demonstrates the importance of students being matched with material on a student’s independent and interest reading level.

Teachers can support students’ searches for interesting and appropriate reading material by exposing them to websites that list engaging adolescent literature. Websites or WebPages of publishers such as Scholastic and Arte Publico Press are wonderful sources for locating adolescent literature. Furthermore, Richard Allington (2001) suggested several resources that will help teachers motivate reluctant readers. Rip-roaring Reads for Reluctant Teen Readers, and Libraries Unlimited are examples of two
of the sources he suggested. Teachers can present book talks on high interest adolescent literature or invite librarians to the classroom to introduce adolescents to high interest reading materials.

**Reader Self-Perception**

Despite continued positive experiences with reading during the eight-week intervention program, participants did not experience a great deal of growth in reader self-perception.

The participants’ years of negative feelings toward reading and themselves as readers were difficult to remediate, even to a small extent, in the short period of time that the study occurred. A blatant example of the burdens that struggling readers carry due to negative experiences with reading occurred in the study when Meredith shared that her first grade teacher yelled at her for not being able to read, which, subsequently, made her hate reading even more. It became apparent to me during the focus group discussions struggling readers incur deep scars because of their negative experiences with reading. We as educators must help children heal while we help them improve their reading ability. There was not enough time in the program to undo years of negative experiences with reading and negative feeling about themselves as readers. Sadly, my short time with the participants could not undo the years of these negative experiences that led them to view themselves poorly as readers.

Although they still had negative perceptions of themselves as readers at the study’s conclusion, I saw glimpses of students’ positive feelings surface about themselves as readers. With more time to improve their reading abilities and to talk about their
feelings about themselves as readers, their reader self-perception scores on The Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) and their feelings may have improved to a greater degree. During the study, I praised their successes in hopes of improving their reading self-perception and discussed the reasons for their negative feelings about reading and themselves as readers. Participants were encouraged to express the stresses they felt related to reading and their successes with reading.

**Implications**

**Implications for Practice**

This study focused on an intervention program and three of the struggling readers who participated in it. One finding that was evident through assessments, interviews, transcript analysis, and observations was that although all three participants were struggling readers, they were very different in their reading struggles and their reading gifts. In that discovery lies the importance of intervention programs that are designed based on a multi-factored assessment results and view each individual learner as more than one test score (Buly & Valencia, 2002). One can conjecture from this study that knowing the children that one teaches is important. It is imperative to avoid assuming that because an individual is labeled as a struggling reader that he or she should be narrowly defined in a category with all other struggling readers.

Extended time for literacy curriculum and instruction is needed for struggling readers to advance in their reading development (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). The after-school program enabled the three struggling readers to improve their reading abilities, and their feelings about reading and themselves as readers. They may not have been able
to accomplish these achievements in a regular school day environment. Struggling
readers need additional time and intensive and accelerated instruction (Allington, 1994) if
they are going to “catch up” with their typical peers. Additional time for intervention can
occur during before school or after-school programs, study hall interventions, or summer
programs. A reading workshop setting where the intervention specialist and regular
education teacher teach reading together is also ideal for promoting struggling reader
growth if implemented correctly. After modeling a mini-lesson for the day that students
are to explore, both teachers have opportunity to meet with several guided reading groups
to practice reading strategy usage, vocabulary acquisition, and discussion of text. When
the students are not meeting with guided reading groups they can actively engage with
literature discussions, centers, reading strategy practice, independent reading, writing
about what they read, word wall practice, or other numerous activities.

Regardless of where they occur, intervention should include a rich balanced
literacy program and be individualized to meet the needs of the learners. Intervention
programs should allow students opportunity to select their own words for vocabulary
study as they encounter them in text or in their environment. Students should have the
opportunity to study and then teach words to one another. Thus, a balanced literacy
program should include vocabulary study.

Students also need time to process what they have learned through reading by
discussing it with others. A balanced literacy program should include time for students to
discuss high interest books in order to make meaning of what they read. Teachers must
spend significant time monitoring, modeling, practicing, and scaffolding group discussion
of text with struggling readers. Allowing students opportunity to discuss books with one another rather than complete worksheets and short answer questions about what they read will increase their reading engagement. Students need to express and know that their voices are heard during the school day, rather than always listening to the teacher’s voice instructing them. Most importantly, it must promote a social community of learners who make meaning of what they read together and experience ownership of their own learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Students in this study requested time to discuss what they read, and discussion helped them make meaning of what they read. Struggling learners need to experience varied opportunities to express their voices in environments such as literature circles, guided reading groups, focus groups, and reading workshops. They need to have the opportunity to reflect on their learning, offer their perceptions and opinions, and talk to one another. Reading workshop provides the opportunity for teachers to implement all of the aforesaid practices (Calkins, 2000).

Intervention teachers must spend significant time monitoring, modeling, practicing, and scaffolding reading strategies with struggling readers in order for students to become independent users of reading strategies (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999). A balanced literacy intervention program should include reading strategy instruction and practice in strategy use. Student ability to explain how to use a reading strategy or use it under the direct observation of the teacher during reciprocal teaching exercises does not guarantee that students will transfer the knowledge and apply reading strategies to independent reading tasks. My main goal for the students in the reciprocal teaching process of reading strategies was that they were able to appropriately use the
reading strategies independently. Often the participants in the study were able to define or describe how to implement reading strategies. They were also able to implement reading strategy usage under direct teacher observation and guidance during reciprocal teaching exercises. However, their implementation of reading strategies during reading in which we were not directly addressing reading strategy usage was limited. Furthermore, evidence of students applying the reading strategies when reading independently was minimal. In order for a sound understanding of reading strategies to occur so that they can apply them, students need intensive, extensive, direct, and repeated independent practice of reading strategy usage (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999). This is an important finding for intervention programs in designing curriculum and instruction. The length of the study may have impeded students’ ability to develop an automatic reading strategy response when encountering challenging text during independent reading.

Another implication of this study is that students should have a choice in what they read. The teacher should provide and match students with a wide variety of engaging materials on their independent and interest level (Moore et al., 1999). The interventions should be rich in meaningful content and include time for students to read and discuss books in order to make meaning of what they read (Bean, 2002).

Students also need time to discuss how they feel about reading. A balanced literacy program should include time each session to address student engagement with reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999). Struggling readers need hope, encouragement, and ideas with regard to improving their reading abilities so that they can
change their feelings about reading and themselves as readers. Providing students with a literacy-rich environment that contains multiple genres of text that they can choose to read will increase their engagement with reading. Intervention must address the improvement of reading engagement by introducing struggling readers to high-interest reading materials at their independent reading levels (Routman, 2003). Furthermore, it must deal with the negative feelings that years of reading failure have ignited in the struggling reader.

**Implications for Future Research**

A study focusing on extensive reading strategy instruction and practice is needed to determine the extent and time period it takes for struggling readers to be independent users of reading strategies. Furthermore, a study focusing on extensive reading self-perception is needed to determine the extent and time period it takes for struggling readers to increase their positive feelings about themselves as readers as their reading development improves. Studies of other types of intervention programs would further inform the research community. Research should explore diverse settings for providing intervention such as: the conventional inclusive language arts classroom, the content area classroom, and intervention sites outside of regular classrooms. Allington (2001) wrote: “Struggling readers have the greatest needs for lessons that foster thoughtfulness. . . . Changing in-school reading environments so that thoughtful literacy is fostered is one of the things that really matters for struggling readers” (p. 110).

Those designing curriculum and instruction could consult a variety of findings to design intervention that is best suited for their struggling reader population. Biancarosa
and Snow (2004) contended in *Reading Next* that school day regular programs and intervention programs for struggling adolescent readers should be “comprehensive and coordinated.”

**Concluding Remarks**

Traditional intervention programs do little to address the needs of the struggling learner. The intervention program examined in this study began by determining students’ strengths and weaknesses through assessment. Each student’s reading history and interest inventories were also analyzed. Subsequently, instruction was designed based on the aforementioned assessment results. A balanced literacy program was implemented to address student needs and build on their strengths. Students were engaged as they self-selected, studied, and taught vocabulary words. The participants selected high-interest reading materials to listen to on tape and read independently. Then students worked together to make meaning of what they read through insightful conversations that provided a platform for making their voices heard. Reciprocal reading strategy instruction provided students with the opportunity to learn practice and teach reading strategies to one another, thus, empowering them with the strategies to comprehend when reading independently. Student engagement and self-perception were improved by providing students with opportunity to discuss their feelings about reading and themselves as readers. The students in the after-school program improved their cognitive and affective reading development and were enthusiastic about reading. The three students allowed me to learn with them and through their experiences as they read, discussed books, and engaged in meaningful literacy accomplishments. Being so closely
enmeshed with their voices, their struggles and their accomplishments gave me deeper insight into the lives of struggling readers, their pains and their joys; and subsequently encouraged my growth as an educator.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INTEREST INVENTORY
Appendix A

Interest Inventory

INTEREST INVENTORY-C

Name: ______________________ Date ______________________

What are your best school subjects?

What do you do for recreation or entertainment?

What are your favorite TV programs?

If someone handed you a newspaper, what sections would you be most interested in reading? (Circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>front page news</th>
<th>comics</th>
<th>Youth Plus Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>product advertise</td>
<td>ment</td>
<td>employment ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sports</td>
<td>editorials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does your family take a daily newspaper?

If so, which one?

Does your family subscribe to any magazines?

If so, which ones?

What magazines do you enjoy reading?

What is the best book you have ever read?

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your interest in reading? (circle)

hate to read = 1--------2--------3--------4--------5--------6--------7--------8--------9--------10 = love to read

What type of books would you select to read? Circle as many as you like.

| mystery | historical | animals |
| science | supernatural | teen problems |
| biography | science fiction | adventure |
| music related—rock stars | romance | movie-based books |
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Appendix B

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Why is reading important?

What do good readers do?

What does someone who struggles to read do when they are reading?

What reading strategies do you know to help you become better readers?

How do you use these reading strategies when reading?

What was one reading strategy that you discussed with a partner?

What did you learn during the discussion with your partner?

How have you used the strategy when reading so far and how did it help you read?

What should a reader do when they come to a word that they do not know?

What is a fluent reader? How does a fluent reader read? What can an individual do to become a fluent reader?

What makes you enjoy reading in school or at home?

What makes you not enjoy reading at school or at home?

What would help you become a better reader?

What in the after-school program has helped you with reading?

What in the after-school program has not helped you with reading?

What do students your age like to read?

What do you like to read?

(Adapted from Robb, L. [2000]. Teaching reading in middle school: A strategic approach to teaching reading that improves comprehension and thinking. New York: Scholastic.)
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix C

Interview Questions

What are your hobbies and some things that interest you?

Do you enjoy reading, why or why not?

Why is reading important to you?

What do you read, and when do you read?

What do you do well as a reader?

What do you feel that you need help with in the area of reading?

Do you read at home and how often do you read?

Do you have a library card, and how often do you visit the public library?

Do you have a school library card, and do you take books out from the school library?

How does reading make you feel?

How do you select reading materials?

What do you do when you do not understand what you are reading?

Do you use reading strategies when you are reading? Explain how you use reading strategies when you are reading and state which ones that you use?

What are some of your favorite books and why are these favorite books?

Who is your favorite author and why is he or she your favorite author?

What do you do when you come to a word that you do not know when you are reading?

(Adapted from Robb, L. [2000]. Teaching reading in middle school: A strategic approach to teaching reading that improves comprehension and thinking. New York: Scholastic.)
APPENDIX D

READER SELF-PERCEPTION SCALE
Appendix D

Reader Self-Perception Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I think I am a good reader</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can tell that my teacher likes me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My teacher thinks that my reading is fine.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I read faster than other kids.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I like to read aloud.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When I read, I can figure out words better than other kids.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My classmates like to listen to me read.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I feel good inside when I read.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My classmates think that I read pretty well.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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